



## **LEARNING DISABILITY, SPORT AND LEGACY**

A Report by the Legacy Research Group on the Special Olympics GB National Summer Games Leicester 2009

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

01. This report examines the holding of the Special Olympics Great Britain (SOGB) National Summer Games – for people with learning disabilities – in Leicester in July 2009. For the first time, the views of the organisers, the athletes, their families and carers and the volunteer ‘army’ who assisted in staging the Games have been systematically collected and analysed.
02. In addition, three on-street surveys covering 919 members of the Leicester public were carried out at broadly six-monthly intervals before, during and after the 2009 Games. Each sample was balanced for age, gender and ethnicity in line with the city’s demographics. The aim here was to assess possible changes in public awareness of learning disability and the local impact of the Games.
03. Taken as a whole, this project offers new quantitative and qualitative data and insights into the role of Special Olympics (SO) in terms of:
  - i. the value of sport for the learning disabled and their families and carers
  - ii. the complex financial and organisational problems posed to host cities
  - iii. public and media awareness of learning disability generated by the Games
  - iv. the critical role of volunteers and the volunteer programme
  - v. the very real challenges of sustaining a viable Games legacy

### PART I: THE GAMES ORGANISATION

04. Sport for the learning disabled has a long if patchy history in the UK, but the Special Olympics movement was founded in the USA in the 1960s. In sporting terms, SO is highly distinctive in that it is based on the dual principles of *participation* as well as *competition*. While all learning disabled athletes can take part in competitions at national and international sporting events, their level is based on their ability as much as their disability. **[See Paragraph 1.1-1.2]**
05. SOGB is only one of several organisations providing sport for the learning disabled in the UK but it is the largest. It was set up in 1978 and currently has approximately 8,500 members. Its growth is not planned on the basis of need but is rather dependent on the *work of local volunteers*. The first SOGB National Summer Games took place in 1982 in Knowsley on Merseyside with 800 athletes. Leicester first hosted the Games in 1989. The Games have become a national mega-event with Leicester 2009 hosting around 2,400 SO athletes, 1,200 coaches plus 6,000 family members and carers. **[1.3-1.4]**

06. Leicester was keen to host the 2009 Games for two main reasons. Firstly, *the place marketing and regenerative* ‘branding’ opportunities it offered the city. Secondly, Special Olympics fitted well with the philosophies and policies of a local authority which had placed emphasis on its work with people with learning disabilities. **[2.1-2.7, 2.10]**
07. SOGB saw Leicester as ideal hosts for the 2009 Games in two key respects. Firstly, the city was seen positively in relation to its work with people with learning disabilities. Secondly, Leicester was regarded as a dynamic, ‘young’ venue which offered the sort of harmonious ethnic diversity that the Special Olympics movement in Britain rather lacked. **[2.9-2.11]**
08. Leicester was awarded hosting rights for the Games in July 2007. This meant there was only two years for the Games’ company, *Leicester Games 2009 Limited* (SOL 2009), to obtain funding for the Games – in a difficult economic climate – market and promote them, and establish the administrative hub necessary to manage a highly complex event. **[2.8, 3.1-3.2]**
09. Leicester councillors and officials were aware that Special Olympics offered possible *branding connections* with London 2012 and they believed this ‘Olympics’ association would ensure their success with potential sponsors for SOL 2009. This confidence proved misplaced: LOCOG resisted all such sponsorship synergies with 2012. The intervening global financial crisis greatly exacerbated the problem of finding alternative commercial funding for the 2009 Games. Eventually, attempts to secure private sponsorship failed almost completely. **[3.3-3.11]**
10. Special Olympics National Summer Games offers some commercial rewards, but it is not financially self-sufficient or profitable, as other mega-events often are. Leicester City Council had no alternative, therefore, but to *underwrite* the cost of hosting the 2009 Games, with Sport England eventually contributing £200,000. It was Leicester City Council’s willingness to help finance the event for the sake of the athletes and their families that saved the Games. This has raised key questions about the funding of future Games. **[3.3-3.11]**
11. These financial problems produced major *logistical consequences*. In particular, much of the detailed planning for the Leicester Games effectively had to be squeezed into a period of around six months. In addition, Leicester lacked some of the sporting facilities necessary to host a number of sports in a single venue; twenty-one sports were staged at 21 venues. **[3.12-3.18]**
12. These challenges placed *extreme organisational pressures* on the SOL board members and on the small number of senior staff seconded from Leicester City Council to run the 2009 Games. Only the willingness of this group to work extreme, unsocial hours, under

great stress for no additional pay, ensured that the Games took place and were a success. [4.1-4.2]

13. Few of the people involved in hosting SOL 2009 had any previous event management experience of working with people with learning disabilities on an event of this scale and type. Much of the necessary learning for 2009 therefore had to be done 'on the job.' Crucially, there was relatively little *knowledge transfer* involved in staging the Games. No detailed template was available from the previous Games held in Glasgow to aid the new hosts, and relatively little technical support on hosting was on offer from the centre at SOGB. [4.3-4.12]

14. Nevertheless, within this much shortened window:

- i. a lavish and unique opening ceremony was planned, rehearsed and delivered
- ii. venues for all events were fully prepared and in some cases updated
- iii. accommodation, transport and meals were successfully managed and coordinated
- iv. a large group of volunteers was recruited, trained and motivated
- v. a massive volume of athletes' paperwork involved was processed
- vi. the event was kept in the local public eye via the appointment of 'ambassadors', the production of newsletters, and through new marketing signage to promote the event as part of the city's 'One Leicester' regeneration campaign [5.1-5.16]

15. To summarise: the 2009 SO National Summer Games were organised in a very short space of time for an event of this scale, with little commercial sponsorship and little knowledge transfer from planning past Games. There was also relatively little local experience available of running events on this scale involving people with learning disabilities. Sports facilities in Leicester made it impossible to run more than one event at any venue, thus adding to the complexities of the event and raising questions about linking venue sites. However, the Games benefited from having a highly committed, if small, full-time staff, enthusiastic volunteers and creative logistical expertise, which together effectively ensured that the 2009 Games were successfully delivered. [6.1-6.4]

## PART II: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GAMES

16. The Games *Opening Ceremony* held at the Walkers Stadium was very well attended and involved a range of breathtaking entertainment, including performances involving work produced by local people with learning disabilities. It was also the key event to engage members of the Leicester public in the Games, and the Opening Ceremony is an important symbolic status for SOGB, the athletes and their families and carers. [7.1-7.2]

17. But the Leicester Opening Ceremony also soon fell behind schedule and was *over-long*, finishing late into the night. A substantial proportion of the crowd – especially those with children – had left before the major acts began and some of the athletes also

became distracted. The high quality of the event was cited later by many athletes, families and other spectators, but a shorter, better regulated ceremony is clearly required in future, or one that begins much earlier. **[7.3-7.9]**

18. Running the SO Games is more complex than running many other sporting mega-events. The athletes have special needs in terms of management, accommodation and transport, and are required to be *assessed and placed* in the appropriate skill categories before the competition itself can commence. Most events ran smoothly in this respect, though certain sports and venues did have their problems. At the swimming event, for example, there were delays and difficulties in *accommodating spectators*. Some of the Leicester public were disappointed to find that there was no public entry to some SO events. **[8.1-8.36]**
19. There is a clear *tension* between promoting the Games as a local spectator event on the one hand, and the use of community sports facilities which are large enough only to house participants and their families on the other. Ironically, one criticism of the Games was that the Leicester public *did not attend in significant numbers* and that some local people seemed unaware about the Games, despite the extensive publicity around it. However, if local people had turned up in greater numbers to some of the events it simply would not have been possible to accommodate them. **[8.2-8.3]**
20. The task of ensuring the smooth running of the Games for its full week of events was the job of the local '*Functional Heads*' who were recruited on a voluntary basis. Their responsibilities included: the opening ceremony, visitor information, medical services, transport, volunteers and event control. All agreed that the budgetary delays and constraints greatly added to their tasks. However, relatively few problems were reported during Games week and most Functional Heads felt the Games had been an intensely rewarding experience, one which had enhanced their skills, despite the difficulties. **[9.1-9.17]**
21. During Games week, meetings with the *Heads of Delegation* from the SOGB regions proved invaluable for local organising staff as these Heads often had extensive experience of previous SOGB events. The HoDs were broadly appreciative of the efforts being made in Leicester, but a lack of a *designated transport link* running through the day to connect different venues, the Games village, and sites of accommodation was cited as an issue for some competitors and carers. Another issue was a relative lack of *evening entertainment*. **[10.1-10.22]**
22. A striking feature of Games week was the *uneven representation* of athletes by region. Greater London, for example, had only 46 competing athletes whilst Scotland, with a significantly smaller total population, had a remarkable 775. This structural imbalance, a function of volunteer activity and/or the impact of statutory local support, also contributed to the heavily 'mono-cultural' nature of the Games. There were very few

BME athletes or carers present, in contrast to the ethnic diversity reflected among the Leicester Games volunteers, for example. [11.1-11.25]

23. Heads of Delegation and family members generally gave high ratings for the *facilities and services* offered during their stay in the city. The city of Leicester also made a very positive impact on those who visited for the Games. Especially important here was the welcome provided in the city and the reported '*friendliness*' of local people and officials of various kinds and the overall 'quality' of the experience of those who came to the city for the Games. [13.1-13.13]
24. SOL 2009 was recognised as being hugely beneficial in the lives of athletes and their families. The Games carried *social, competitive and health rewards* as well as a sense of a positive, collective *shared* experience during the week. For athletes, training for and then competing at the Games aided their fitness and well-being, gave them a sense of purpose and developed self-esteem. Families and carers often feel isolated on a daily basis and for them Games week both offers a welcome experiential and psychological 'time out', and lets them know that they are not alone in caring for a disabled child. [13.14-13.20]
25. There was almost unanimous agreement that the SOL 2009 *volunteer programme* had been an outstanding success. Approximately 1500 volunteers were originally recruited, but in the end 1050 took part: 676 coming from the city and 314 from the county. School and college students and the retired were predictably over-represented here. The latter group included some volunteers who had worked previously with people with learning disabilities. Some volunteers were also drawn from local young offender centres. An important feature of the 2009 Games was that 81 volunteers – and some volunteer trainers – themselves had learning disabilities. One concern among volunteers was that there was not always *sufficient work* for them to do around the Games sites, especially as visitors became more familiar with Games procedures and venues. [12.1-12.13]
26. According to official estimates, around 40% of volunteers were drawn from *BME communities*. This seems a remarkable figure, although actually not one out of line with Leicester's ethnically diverse population. For the first time, volunteer *training* was provided prior to the Games and this was a great success. As a consequence, SOL 2009 created a trained group, many of whom might remain engaged, or volunteer again in the future. How many volunteers might continue to work, post-Games, in sport with *people with learning disabilities*, however, was rather less clear-cut. [12.14-12.19]
27. One of the most successful features of the Games' volunteer programme were the *social and cultural exchanges* that occurred between younger BME Games volunteers and athletes with learning disabilities and their carers. The benefits of these exchanges were reciprocal. Meeting people with learning disabilities not only improved the

awareness of learning disability amongst younger volunteers but also visitors had positive experiences through meeting volunteers from BME backgrounds. [12.20-12.45]

28. Our detailed focus on the *media reporting and representation* of the Games in the press, on radio and on television showed that local radio and the *Leicester Mercury* were very strong supporters of the event throughout. The Games though made relatively little impact on the national media. At a regional level, however, ITV was an important broadcast partner, providing an estimated £400,000 worth of TV coverage. During Games week, ITV Central Tonight broadcast a daily, dedicated feature on SOL 2009 live from Leicester and devoted around 20% of its news coverage to the event. BBC regional TV news also covered the event on both its early and late evening news. [14.1-14.41]
29. Despite this welcome media exposure of Special Olympics, the coverage conveyed some 'mixed messages' concerning sport and learning disability. The media reporting of the Games was overwhelming positive. However, it also reflected tensions in the *styles of media reporting*. It was sometimes difficult for journalists to respond to, and represent, the competitors as *athletes*. Instead, the main story was reported as a human-interest one, which focussed on athletes' learning disabilities and personal and carer issues. Moreover, there was very little reference to the wider political context of learning disability. [14.1.14.41]
30. This media coverage of Special Olympics should become a stable feature of future Games. But we suggest some basic *awareness training* for broadcasters might be appropriate. It would also be useful if the Games Organisers and SOGB had more strategic aims at hand in terms of what they want to achieve from this brief, extended media focus on people with learning disabilities.

### PART III: THE GAMES LEGACY

31. There is no substantial *facilities (hard) legacy* of the 2009 Games; Leicester did not build new sports arenas specifically to host the Special Olympics. However, we have made some preliminary estimates of the local *economic legacy* of the 2009 Games. We agree with local commentators that, despite its financial problems, Special Olympics provided a boost to the local economy during a very difficult economic period. Visitor-related businesses and the local retail sector both clearly benefitted. Our estimates indicate that visitors to Leicester during the Games contributed up to £2.8 million in additional spending (including accommodation) in the city. [15.1-15.23]
32. We conducted three public surveys before, during and after the 2009 Games to assess both local responses to Leicester hosting the event and attitudes towards people with learning disabilities. This was an entirely new feature of research on Special Olympics. In terms of *local awareness*, six months before the Games, 30% of local people knew they



were being held in Leicester. This figure rose to 60% while the Games were occurring, but fell again to 30% just six months after the Games. [16.1-16.45]

33. This suggests a rather low legacy impact in terms of *local awareness*. But eight-out-of-ten local people said they had heard of 'Special Olympics' during the week of the Games, falling to seven-out of-ten six months later. General awareness about the Games was greatest *among older, white respondents*, suggesting perhaps that the main avenues for disseminating the Games message – local authority sources, the local daily press, local radio – may not be the best way to reach younger people. Our findings also suggest that it may be more challenging to engage especially young people and people from ethnic minorities in support or awareness around Special Olympics. [16.1-16.45]
34. At all three phases of the research the Leicester public were overwhelmingly *in favour* of the city hosting the Games. This suggests that the funding problems did not dent local public support for Special Olympics. A resounding 90% of respondents thought Leicester should be '*proud*' of hosting Special Olympics. Before the Games 80% of local people thought the Games would improve Leicester's public image, but six months after the event this figure had fallen to just over half (55%). [16.1-16.45]
35. Results concerning attitudes to people with learning disabilities were mixed. More than eight-out-of-ten of all respondents surveyed during and after the Games agreed that it was *good to have the opportunity to mix* with people with learning disabilities. Almost two-thirds (65%) also agreed that the Games had 'brought disabled and non-disabled people in Leicester *closer together*'. Moreover, six months after the Games, 35% of all respondents agreed that hosting Special Olympics in the city had made them '*more aware*' of the problems of people with learning disabilities. On the other hand, we found relatively little evidence that hosting the Games added substantially to local public knowledge about the *nature of learning disability*. [16.15-16.39]
36. Special Olympics has its critics. They argue that the Games both sustains poorly resourced, separate provision for people with learning disabilities and also promotes and perpetuates a patronizing, sentimental public attitude towards them. There is some force to this critique. However, we have argued that Special Olympics offers important opportunities for *self-realization, competition and sociability* for athletes, family members and carers. It also provides a potential forum for developing greater awareness and lasting relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. [17.9-17.22]
37. Hosting the 2009 Games put the issue of learning disabilities more strongly on the *social policy agenda* in Leicester, especially health care. However, local professionals were also very well aware that this impact might be short-lived, unless their work was prioritised and properly resourced over the longer term. The 2009 Special Olympics raised the profile and 'opened doors' for the Learning Disability Team in Leicester, but in the face

of swingeing cuts to local authority budgets, realistically, providing more resources for their work seems unlikely. [17.23-17.27, 17.55-17.58]

38. We found some evidence for a local *sporting legacy*. Firstly, the Games raised awareness among local authority sports staff about learning disability and prompted a review concerning the suitability of local facilities and services for people with learning disabilities. Secondly, the Games has produced a sports volunteer database combining new and experienced workers. Third, the development of the Young Athletes programme and growing connections between learning disability sports groups and the inclusive annual Youth Games in Leicestershire also offer promise for the future. A post-Games legacy goal should be a more integrated and more comprehensive sports services locally for people with learning disabilities. However, such ambitious prospects seem to be limited by a lack of post-Games strategic thinking, the restricted reach of Special Olympics, and the new funding restraints on local authorities. [17.28-17.35]
39. We found relatively little evidence of *local planning* for the wider legacy of the 2009 Games and any local ambitions – for example to link outcomes of SOL 2009 with London 2012 – were constrained by the worsening economic climate. This might best have involved local private and third sector agencies who work with people with learning disabilities, the local authority, SOGB, and local sports clubs and other sports providers, including governing bodies. It was frequently expressed locally that the Games should *not* operate as a stand-alone event, but the intense pressures of delivery, lack of resources and the relative isolation of SOGB from other disability and sports agencies made such post-Games logistical work very difficult to realize. As a result, there is no existing local forum for the impact of the Games to be built upon and sustained. [17.36-17.59]
40. In light of the financial problems of funding the 2009 Games and the present economic downturn, the SOL finance sub-committee meeting on 18 December 2009 concluded that: ‘The Games are not sustainable in its present format’. We agree with this view. Certainly, cities of Leicester’s size are likely to look critically in future at the prospect of bidding to host such Games in a deteriorating global economic climate. Other sources of funding support, perhaps from central government and/or sports governing bodies, will surely be needed to sustain future Games. This may be especially important given the IOC’s re-inclusion of some elite learning disability athletes into the Paralympic Games. [17.37-17.63]
41. The 2009 Games were, in our view, something of a *watershed for SOGB*. Ironically, bringing the Games to Leicester served only to highlight some of the limitations of the Special Olympics concept. This not only included the relative lack of support and expertise offered to Games hosts, but also Special Olympics’ near exclusive reliance on local volunteering for providing sporting opportunities for people with learning disabilities. These limitations, combined with some cultural resistance inside BME

communities, has meant that Special Olympics, in its *ethnic exclusivity* and its relative lack of impact in urban centres – illustrated by the meagre representation from London – no longer reflects the diverse face of modern Britain. [17.64-17.70]

42. To meet these new challenges, SOGB needs to *modernise*. In doing so, it will have to assess a number of different potential scenarios concerning how best it might now service people with learning disabilities, and also the future of the National Summer Games itself. In this report we have offered a number of possible ways forward and pointed to the various difficulties and likely rewards involved. There is no silver bullet solution. However, it seems unlikely that the Games can continue in its present format without perpetuating these forms of exclusion or rationalising, or even downsizing, as a means of responding to the new economic agenda. [17.64-17.70]
43. We conclude this report by arguing that, for all its excellent work and past successes, SOGB has now to ask itself if it really geared up, in its current guise, for the considerable challenges which lie ahead? And is it, in its present format, offering the best opportunities possible for people with learning disabilities from a range of backgrounds who want to play competitively and who wish to participate in sport? The challenge is to mobilise and engage people with learning disabilities who are currently outside the limited scope of SOGB as well as other learning disability organisations that cater for sport. The future is uncertain, but what does seem clear is that substantial change, both for SOGB and in the provision for sport for British people with learning disabilities, is now non-negotiable. [17.71]

## **PART I: THE ORGANISATION OF THE GAMES**

### **1. Introduction: Special Olympics GB<sup>1</sup>**

1.1 Provision for disability sport in general and for learning disabled sport in particular has been very limited until recently. Sport for the physically disabled was first developed after the First World War and more fully after the Second World War, especially in the context of the efforts to improve the lives of those with spinal injuries. However, the possibilities of sport as a means of improving the health, self-esteem and happiness of those with learning disabilities was very restricted until the founding of the 'Special Olympics' movement in the United States in the 1960s. The purpose of this movement was to provide sporting opportunities for the learning disabled regardless of ability or age with an emphasis on participation rather than excellence through the organization of clubs taking part in national and international competitions using an Olympic format including opening and closing ceremonies and the awarding of gold, silver and bronze medals, 'host cities' and four yearly cycles of Games. The founder of this movement was Eunice Kennedy Shriver who had a learning disabled sister, Rosemary, and had the influence and resources of the Kennedy family behind her. Special Olympics flourished in the USA, where Shriver's son continues to take a lead, but it also spread significantly in the last forty years to create a world movement with national, continent-based and world gatherings. The SO movement is, of course, only one of a number of ways to bring sport to the learning disabled. In concentrating on the SO movement in Britain and analyzing its National Summer Games of 2009 in unprecedented depth, the research team was also aware that there is now a greater range of sporting provision for the learning disabled than before, although for the purposes of our research only the work Special Olympics GB is considered here.

1.2 In 1975, Chris Maloney, a Gloucestershire swimming instructor, began teaching children with learning disabilities in his area how to swim. He became convinced that Special Olympics

could work for people in the UK with learning disabilities. Two years later Maloney contacted Shriver and ambitiously promised there would be a British team present at the International Special Olympics in New York State in 1979. In response to a request for help and advice from Maloney, Shriver put him in touch with Sir Hugh Fraser MP, whose network of contacts included Sir Eldon Griffiths, a former Sports Minister and then chairman of the Sports Council. With their support, Maloney was able to launch Special Olympics UK and register it as a charity in 1978. The new organisation had a regional structure based on that of the Sports Council composed of the different regions of England, Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands. Working with a developing network of volunteers, Maloney was able to select a delegation of 32 athletes to represent Britain in America in August 1979. This was the birth of Special Olympics in Great Britain.

1.3 Throughout Britain, volunteer coaches were trained in a range of different sports, and local and regional competitions were also organised. The first Special Olympics National Games took place in Knowsley, Merseyside, in July 1982. The Borough of Knowsley provided food and accommodation for 800 athletes and their coaches over the three days of the Games, one of which was occupied by the Games Opening Ceremony. Athletes took part in 12 different sporting disciplines at venues around the borough. The next SO National Games were hosted by Brighton in 1986: this time there were 900 athletes competing in 15 different sports. A broadly similar pattern of development was evident in Europe and a Special Olympics European Games were held in Glasgow in 1990. Because of the timing of this European event, it meant that the third SOGB National Games were brought forward by a year to 1989 when Leicester hosted them.

1.4 The 1989 National Games cost £750,000 to run. Nearly half the costs were met by the competitors and Special Olympics regions through their own fundraising. The remaining £400,000 was raised in the city mainly through community fundraising. In other words the Leicester Games was primarily funded by athletes and by the city rather than through other forms of sponsorship. Some UK companies did make financial contributions which together

with other donations and gifts in kind amounted to around £1 million.<sup>2</sup> This ensured that the first Leicester Games were a financial as well as a sporting success. A small army of 800 local volunteers made sure the Games ran smoothly while some of the transport was provided by double-decker buses loaned by the British Shoe Corporation, then a large employer in Leicester.<sup>3</sup> A major legacy of the first Leicester Games was the inspiration it gave to local people with learning disabilities to get involved in Special Olympics and to take part in sport. In 1989 many UK adults with learning disabilities spent their days in 'industrial units' or day centres. They worked for a small wage that supported a range of activities including athletics and swimming and these groups provided athletes who took part in the Games. Others were taken in groups to watch the competitions and this offered inspiration for what people with similar disabilities might achieve. Some of the original Leicester athletes were still involved in Special Olympics 20 years later in 2009.

1.5 After Leicester in 1989, the National Games continued on a four-year pattern, each subsequent event bigger and more ambitious than the previous one. By the time of its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009, again in Leicester, Special Olympics GB had 135 registered clubs throughout England, Scotland and Wales with over 2,200 coaches and volunteers providing year-round training and regular opportunities for competition for more than 8,000 adults and children over eight years of age with learning disabilities. Despite this growth, the national organisation remains a relatively small charity with only a handful of paid staff. Training and other regular activities are organised almost entirely by the efforts and commitment of volunteers and athletes' family members. Although sponsorship by Coca Cola Ltd and National Grid helped with the organisation of sports, SOGB today receives no substantial financial support from national sporting bodies or the state. Hence from the outset the key feature of SOGB was the way a small organisation was able to put on a large event through the support of a host city rather than other forms of government, business or charitable support.

## 2. Bidding for the 2009 Games

2.1 Successfully hosting major sporting events is an increasingly important means through which today's more dynamic and ambitious cities can compete for prestige, recognition and status in the national and international arena of 'place marketing'. The public reputation of cities can be built around their media exposure in promoting major cultural and sporting activities, and the act of hosting such events can also impact positively on the self-perception and confidence of local people and also offer significant economic and social benefits for local communities and businesses. All these issues played a part in Leicester bidding to host the 2009 Special Olympics National Summer Games. But at least part of the inspiration also came from two domestic priorities: firstly, the city's perceived once-in-a-generation opportunity to reap local benefits through sport from London's hosting of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; and, secondly, hopes that by hosting Special Olympics the city of Leicester might prove itself to have the confidence to be a viable candidate for hosting other major sports events.<sup>4</sup>

2.2 The Leicester Partnership Executive Working Group had been established in 2006 precisely to develop a co-ordinated approach towards maximising any potential opportunities for Leicester that might derive from London being the next Olympic Games host city.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a case was put to the Cabinet members at Leicester's Liberal Democrat/Conservative coalition administration to host the 2009 Games. This was largely on the basis of its potential impact to engage *all* local young people in sport and physical exercise in Leicester, but also because of the tangible material and symbolic connections that might be drawn between Special Olympics 2009 and London 2012. As the Games Executive Director Richard Watson put it:

*The case [to Cabinet] was based around Leicester as a sporting city. It has a good reputation in terms of trying to make sport accessible for everyone. It's centrally located; a good place to be. The telling point was that we saw it [Special Olympics] as part of the journey to 2012. We were excited about the potential opportunities that it generated in stimulating interest in sport and physical activity and [we] saw Special Olympics as being an ideal event to host in the city: the only other event with 'Olympics' in the title to take place between 2009 and 2012! It was an opportunity not to be missed; to maximise the*

*potential benefits of the Olympic theme, the Olympic movement, and to generate interest among young people, in particular, in healthy lifestyles.*<sup>6</sup>

2.3 Like many other similarly enthusiastic sporting cities in Britain, Leicester has relatively little realistic hope today of hosting world class ‘mega-events’ in sport, or even one of the world championship events for more ‘minor’ sports, as it had once done for track cycling in the 1970s. International competition, local economic restraints, the lack of suitable facilities and the wide range of sports played in the city make it unlikely that public funds in Leicester – or in similar sized British cities – could be easily be ploughed into the production of exceptional world class facilities for any single sport of the standard that is now required to host elite national or international sports championships. This is one reason why events like Special Olympics GB Summer Games are especially important for cities of Leicester’s modest size but high aspirations. Although it has been growing in scale, the Summer Games is still relatively manageable in scale, and its primary focus is on participation and the use of community facilities for sport rather than on the production of world class ones. Special Olympics though offers the promotional opportunities for medium-sized provincial ‘sporting’ cities like Leicester that most other major sporting events, realistically, simply do not.

2.4 Another reason for making the bid was that the likely outcomes of hosting Special Olympics fitted very well with the strategic partnerships and local consultations which had produced *One Leicester*, a regeneration strategy designed to ‘transform’ the city and its people over the next 25 years. Special emphasis had been given here to improving well-being and health, investing in young people, promoting local skills and enterprise, and generally ‘talking up’ the city and its citizens. All of these policy aspirations connected well with ambitions to host Special Olympics. Leicester City Council also saw itself as a leading local authority in terms of its policies and record on the employment of people with learning disabilities, so it had some experience and perhaps a deeper understanding of the issues involved in this area as well as ‘a very good local record in terms of its provision of community sport’.<sup>7</sup>



2.5 Sport England's recent *Active People* survey found evidence of low rates of participation and high obesity levels in Leicester.<sup>8</sup> It was argued that hosting an event, such as Special Olympics, could help challenge these disappointing results. For some local politicians, however, hosting the Summer Games also offered a different view of the city in relation to issues of diversity and inclusion to the one more usually recognised in the city and outside. Councillor Andy Connelly, for example, Labour Cabinet member for Culture and Leisure and thus one of the City Council nominees on the 2009 Games Board, argued that the decision to host the 2009 Games also had a distinctive *moral* agenda for Leicester: 'As a city we are offering something back to society' he suggested because, 'the strength of any city or any society is not how it looks after the able [bodied] and the rich, but how it looks after the poor and the disabled.' In addition to this, there were also obvious benefits in terms of extending the diversity profile of Leicester but, critically, with a message that had relevance *across* its ethnically distinctive local communities:

*As a city we ought to be bidding for these sorts of events. It's important for a city which talks about being culturally diverse, multi-cultural, etc. Too often as a city I think we tend to get too tied up with issues of race and ethnicity. We also need to recognise, as a diverse city, [that] there are other groups – the disabled, etc – that we should look to support. It gives us an opportunity to showcase the city and put on a Games that Special Olympics will be proud of.<sup>9</sup>*

2.6 Moreover, hosting the 2009 Games fitted very well with the general philosophy of the local authority in Leicester about the relationship between sport and the wider participation and social inclusion agendas. In this sense, as Richard Watson pointed out:

*As a City Council, our job is about inclusion and participation ... For people with [a] learning disability it gives them an outlet, something that shows they can achieve. The joy and enthusiasm they give to that and the benefits it gives them in terms of social integration and doing this thing they otherwise wouldn't be able to do, is a real bonus for their life.<sup>10</sup>*

Steve White, retired head teacher and sporting advocate for Leicester, member of the Schools Development Sports Agency, Chair of the Leicester Sports Alliance and also 2009 Games Board member, also had powerful, positive memories about 1989 – and strong views about the relevance of Special Olympics to the city and its people today:

*I can remember going around the old Saffron Lane [athletics] track in 1989, seeing what it meant to those people participating, but more so to the parents. That registered, so when I heard 18 years on that Leicester had an opportunity [to host again] I was right up for that ... I wanted to stress the message Special Olympics has for everybody. For me, it was about inclusion. What it seeks out, through the medium of sport, is not actually disability but the ability people have. This is a platform which gives everybody something to be proud of.*<sup>11</sup>

2.7 According to the Leicester bid document, hosting the 2009 Games would also provide ‘another opportunity to build community cohesion by engaging the whole community in a major national event for people with learning disabilities’. This – arguably paradoxical – emphasis on the use of a sporting event that is limited to people with learning disabilities as an active means of creating new *connections* between such athletes and other members of local communities, was a powerful element of the Leicester philosophy for hosting Summer Games 2009. The Leicester bid, for example, argued that, as a major disability event, Special Olympics could be expected to ‘encourage vulnerable adults to get involved in sport – challenging stereotypes, promoting community cohesion and bringing people together’.<sup>12</sup> It would be important for Leicester, therefore, to measure the impact on local people of hosting Special Olympics as part of the legacy of the 2009 Games. Would local public knowledge of and attitudes toward people with learning disabilities *change* in the region as a consequence of Leicester hosting Special Olympics? This was an interesting and important question that required some empirical measurement and one which we address directly in this report.

2.8 The decision concerning which city, Leicester or Southampton, would host the 2009 Games was expected to be made by the end of April 2007.<sup>13</sup> However, no formal announcement was actually made until 13 July 2007 – just two years before the Games were due to be staged. Mega-sporting events tend to operate to a rather different timetable from this one: those on a four year cycle typically ‘hand-over’ to the next host at the previous event. The FIFA World Cup – a much larger sporting event – is now allocated eight years in advance. Leicester, ultimately, won the contest to host the 2009 Games because it was able to demonstrate, conclusively, that

it could deliver on all the core requirements for potential hosts and the city also believed it could successfully fund the Games. The basic prerequisites for SOGB with respect to hosting the Summer Games typically *exclude* an extended discussion of arrangements for funding. Instead they specify: a supportive local council; suitable and sufficient accommodation (the local universities); appropriate sporting facilities, and especially a reasonably-sized modern stadium to host the opening ceremony (in this case the Walkers Stadium); and sufficient volunteer capacity and the effective co-ordination of volunteers.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the city had shown that it had a number of other potential advantages over its rivals. Firstly, Leicester certainly *wanted* and understood the Games; this fact was evidenced by its willingness to host for the second time. Secondly, Leicester had a passionate advocate for learning disability sport in its future Games Director, Steve Humphries, a man who had previous experience in this field. Thirdly, the city had produced what everyone agreed was a high quality, technically sound and well integrated bid and Leicester had the necessary partnerships and professionalism in place to make the Games work successfully. Finally, this successful multi-cultural city offered, potentially at least, a new route towards greater inclusivity for SOGB.

2.9 It was this last point that particularly appealed to Special Olympics GB's Chief Operating Officer Karen Wallin. She had been mindful of complex geographical and national questions around the staging of recent Summer Games, and also about the narrow ethnic make-up of Special Olympics administration and the bulk of its competitors and coaches. Taking these overlapping issues into account, the strong view of SOGB was:

*'Yes, we've got to take it [to] Leicester', because I think for us, for an organisation that is very much a white – I wouldn't say middle-class, but we are a white-run organization – and that is just so wrong. And I think in terms of the bidding process that was what really clinched because Leicester could offer us this opportunity to speak to so many different religions and ethnic minorities and it's in the centre of the country as well ... Glasgow was big, but it was very much a Scottish games; Cardiff very much Welsh. And so to bring it back to the centre of England was again another major factor in us deciding that Leicester would be the place for us to do some regeneration of Special Olympics.'*<sup>15</sup>

2.10 In choosing Leicester, Special Olympics GB certainly showed some much-needed awareness that, as a matter of some urgency, it did need to broaden the scope of its activities and to 'regenerate', as Wallin puts it, in order to appeal to new, younger audiences and to attract in new athletes, coaches and volunteers from a much wider range of British communities. These new recruits might then also be expected to become much more centrally involved in highlighting the wider issues facing people with learning disabilities and promoting and delivering learning disability sport. This was perhaps especially important in some minority ethnic communities in Britain where learning disability could often be masked or hidden from public view. Hosting the Games in Leicester might also strengthen the work of Special Olympics in larger urban areas where its impact was often quite weak.<sup>16</sup> Changing the age profile and the diversity of Special Olympics to better reflect the changed (and still changing) social and ethnic composition of late-modern Britain remain important stated objectives of the organization:

*Our athletes are aging, our volunteers ... It's an aging population. We realise that we need to reach out many more communities and young people, and I think again that Leicester is a young, vibrant city with the two universities as well. So that was three things really: the community; the ethnic minorities; [and] a young vibrant city. And Leicester being in the centre of the country – [these] were the things that clinched it.*<sup>17</sup>

2.11 There was also a strong commitment in Leicester to establish a demonstrable 'Games legacy', one that would positively influence education, health, well-being and social care as well as provide employment more opportunities for people with learning disabilities.<sup>18</sup> 'If Leicester is leading on some of these issues about the recognition of people with learning disabilities' said Ted Cassidy, Games Board Chairman, 'then having something like this [Summer Games] is very powerful.'<sup>19</sup>

### **3. Planning the 2009 Games**

3.1 Once the success of the Leicester bid was announced the next step was to form the groupings that would establish how to pay for, design, organise and deliver the Games. The

relevant partners for SOL 2009 included: Leicester City Council; SOGB; NHS Leicester City; Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL); Transport providers; University of Leicester; De Montfort University; Leicestershire County Council; Leicester Chamber of Commerce; representatives of the local business community; and key individuals with a specific interest and commitment to sport or learning disability.<sup>20</sup> Representatives from these partners formed a company limited by guarantee, *Leicester Games 2009 Limited* on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007. This Games' company (SOL) had the responsibility for overseeing the organisation of the Games, in particular relevant legal issues, fundraising and finance matters. From De Montfort University, Ted Cassidy, whose role in the university was to develop local and regional partnerships and who had wide experience of local government and politics, was appointed as the chairman in February 2008. Former Leicester City chief executive Tim Davies was appointed vice-chair. Richard Watson, Director of Cultural Services at Leicester City Council became Executive Games Director, together with a group of advisors who provided the necessary executive support. Establishing a charity run by a board of trustees is the usual method of managing the delivery of the Games recommended by SOGB. It has become the tried-and-tested approach to running such events. This approach provides for important independence and transparency, but it also offers considerable risk, especially in an inhospitable economic climate and with little public funding available for this kind of disability sports event. With neither a firm agreement about underwriting any shortfall in funding nor relatively little time to raise the money required, SOL was now reliant on its own ingenuity and a positive response of funders and sponsors to make the Games a viable proposition.

3.2 SOL began its activities in January 2008 – just 19 months from Games' delivery. The Board first began work on financial planning, corporate governance, commercial activities, and developing a credible business plan for the Games. A Games Organising Committee (GOC), led by Games Director, Steve Humphries, was created. Some SOL Board members joined the GOC and took on additional leadership roles in key areas: planning, organisation, sponsorship, marketing and promotion, legacy, fundraising and volunteering issues. This meant that the two bodies worked in a co-ordinated manner, sharing some personnel and objectives, rather than

the GOC playing a subservient role in a more hierarchical structure. Some Board members also served on the Finance Sub-Committee, a body formed to monitor the Games budget and oversee sponsorship, income, expenditure, banking, VAT, company accounts and insurance. Later, once it became apparent that the world was in the grip of a major economic recession, this group also had to take into consideration the worsening financial climate and its likely impact on the 2009 Games.

3.3 SOL began with a plan to raise an initial working budget of £3.75 million to deliver the Games, a figure based on the experience of Glasgow, the previous hosts of the SOGB National Summer Games. The budget assumed a contribution of about £1 million from participating athletes, with the balance to be obtained from grants, commercial sponsorship and donations. In order to raise funds through commercial sponsorship, *First Rights*, a marketing company, was appointed following a bidding process and interviews under the behest of SOGB.<sup>21</sup> *First Rights* was commissioned to develop a sponsorship strategy for the Games with the objective of raising an anticipated £1.5-2.5 million from commercial sources. Their strategy document concluded by stating that to have any chance of success in achieving the sponsorship target it was imperative that a broadcast partner was secured and that a comprehensive and robust PR and marketing plan was created.<sup>22</sup> The Board endorsed this strategy and entered into a legal agreement with *First Rights*.

3.4 To monitor the financial aspects of the Board's work, an experienced accountant was appointed on a voluntary basis. In July 2008, the anticipated real cost of delivering the Games was calculated. The Board agreed that £3.4 million was the minimum sum required to host the Games, but that a figure of £4.8 million could produce the kind of Games that Leicester wanted, and had planned, to deliver. Quite quickly, however, it became clear that some of the key funding and sponsorship targets were unlikely to be reached. This was probably for three main reasons and one subordinate one:

- Firstly, and crucially, the impact of the global recession, which had slashed many private sector sponsorship budgets and reduced the capacity of the public sector to support non-essential expenditure;
- Secondly, the initial belief at *First Rights* that SOGB Summer Games 2009 could gain sponsorship benefit from links with London 2012. This was a mistaken assumption and the London 2012 organising body, LOCOG, continued to resist any possibilities of connecting activities around SOL 2009 with the 2012 Olympic Games brand
- Thirdly, the weaker status of Special Olympics compared to other mainstream sports events, and especially to those primary events that also carry the ‘Olympics’ brand
- Fourthly, the fact that, especially in the shadow of preparations for London 2012, national funding for sport in the UK was currently much more directly focused on supporting excellence at the top end of the sporting pyramid rather than on more broadly-based policies of stimulating participation in sport

3.5 On the first point, the timing for seeking commercial sponsorship for sport and cultural activities could hardly have been worse. The sponsorship agency appointed by SOL was, almost literally, discussing funding support from major banks for the 2009 Games at the very moment the scale of the crisis in the finance sector became apparent.<sup>23</sup> On the third and fourth points, it soon became clear to the local organisers – perhaps to their surprise – that financial support from central government and sports governing bodies for the Games was at best likely to be very limited. The peculiar charitable origins of Special Olympics, its philosophy concerning sporting participation over excellence, and the existing structures of the organisation all probably played their part in the persistence of its ‘outsider’ status in British sport and the consequent statutory neglect of its financial needs. Recognition of Special Olympics by government and within Sport England is generally weak, though importantly Sport England did ultimately contribute £200,000 to the staging of the 2009 Games. Of crucial importance here is the fact that the major national governing bodies for sport all have their own varying policies

and strategies in relation to servicing disability sport and that learning disabled sport in particular has received scant attention and support.

3.6 The cumulative effect of all this in the build up to 2009 – and this would have been the case even without a global financial crisis – was to marginalise learning disability athletes and effectively to sideline Special Olympics. *First Rights* were certainly ambitious and aggressive in their proposals for raising commercial sponsorship for SO. They felt strongly – perhaps not fully recognising some of the commercial and legal proprieties in this area – that some of the key sponsors already committed to LOCOG should be approached to help fund the 2009 Games on the basis that Special Olympics might be publicly identified as the third ‘member’ of the international Olympic movement. In every major company contacted, *First Rights* reported a ‘genuine respect’ for Special Olympics and a willingness to support the Games in principle. But the key stumbling block in all these negotiations remained the obvious tension between the Special Olympics brand identifier and the stringent commercial restraints applied on making any links at all between the 2009 Games and the wider Olympic movement, LOCOG or London 2012. In its highly unusual protocol with the International Olympic Committee, Special Olympics is allowed to use ‘Olympics’ in its title, but the organisation is prohibited on specific legal grounds from associating any of its activities with the Olympic Games or Paralympics, the ‘Five Rings’ or any other Olympic Games symbolism. By the same token, the official sponsors of the Olympic Games cannot publicly ‘bundle’ their IOC-related sponsorships with any proposed financial support for Special Olympics.

3.7 Moreover, raising large sums in sponsorship for Special Olympics differs from routine matters of event fundraising and perhaps sits better as part of a company’s corporate social responsibility agenda. Being a sponsor involves a substantial financial commitment to a sport. It is regarded as an investment for which a commercial advantage – via association or exposure – is expected in return. This raised (and continues to raise) the question: is Special Olympics ‘real’ sport or something quite different in the eyes of potential sponsors? And, where exactly



did an event such as Special Olympics Summer Games fit into the modern commercial arena of sports fundraising and sponsorship? Karen Wallin understood these difficulties:

*I think companies find where to 'put' Special Olympic very difficult. Are we just purely CSR (Corporate and Social Responsibility) or, you know, when you start talking about sponsorship there has to be some tangible business benefits for a big company, Coke, Visa, whatever. There has to be business benefits: they are not a charity. So when you are asking them [companies] for a half a million [pounds] for a Games that is a week long, and it is just about one sector of society and that's learning disabled; and it is not elite and it is not about winning medals; and we are not on the television and we haven't got a media partner; ... [The companies] they are like: 'What's in it for me then?' So it comes out of sponsorship and goes to CSR. And then CSR are, well, maybe I'm wrong, but I've never known massive CSR budget of half a million [pounds] before for one organization. Not for just one event that's going to be a week and [then] finished.<sup>24</sup>*

3.8 The lack of a major sponsor, or a group of large sponsors, willing to offer the necessary support for 2009 meant that SOL urgently had to re-assess its income projections and establish at least a basic budget that would deliver the Games. All this readjustment certainly came as something of a surprise to the local politicians in Leicester who had happily inherited the hosting of the Games from a previous Leicester administration of a different political hue. Even when the financial problems became clear there was no public dissent among politicians in Leicester about hosting the Games. But Councillor Andy Connelly, Labour Cabinet member for Culture and Leisure, admitted that there had been disappointment and some mystification about the Games' financial difficulties. This was rooted in the confusion that existed among local politicians in the city about the status of Special Olympics, and the very little knowledge they had of its complex and sometimes strained relationship with the wider Olympic movement:

*The relationship between Special Olympics and the Olympics is something that needs to be addressed. As Councillors we didn't really understand this at all, to be honest. As soon as you see the word 'Olympics' you just assume it has all the influence and cachet that goes with it. It has not. It's almost that feeling that it [Special Olympics] is the long-lost uncle that no-one wants to speak to ... I think the Olympic movement needs to address that, if it wants to be inclusive. Special Olympics has a place and it is something that should be supported by the whole [Olympic] movement.<sup>25</sup>*

3.9 One other important consideration here – which is hinted at above by Karen Wallin – is the typical return on sponsorship which is usually offered by sport. An association with top-level sport typically promises sponsors the attractive benefits of a perceived synergy or association with an activity identified with notions of health, youth and excellence, positive characteristics which are perceived to reside in sport and outside the normal constraints of everyday life. Even Paralympics is aimed at celebrating sporting excellence, albeit in different disability categories. An association with Special Olympics, by contrast, offers rather different and much more complex messages and opportunities, and therefore demands a much more nuanced relationship with sponsors in most of these respects. Such an association might also even offer specific kinds of *risk* that some sponsors might naturally shy away from; the importance of the use of acceptable discourses about disability, for example, and of developing appropriate forms of knowledge and practices specifically around learning disability, among them.

3.10 The Board reassessed its contributions and worked out that it actually had a basic minimum budget of £2.762 million. This figure assumed no corporate sponsorship and a reduced level of grants from the public sector. This left SOL 2009 with a projected financial shortfall for running the Games of around £1.2 million. Still with no major sponsor and little prospect of finding one, on 23 January 2009 the Leicester Board decided to organise the Games on the basis of a substantially reduced budget. Leicester City Council now agreed to underwrite any budget shortfall, but only on the understanding that the Board would continue to make every effort possible to raise additional funds to keep this likely additional public subsidy to a minimum. The problems involved in raising sponsorship and the associated delays in agreeing a substantive budget meant that even six months before the Games were due to begin the Leicester Board was still unable to commit expenditure on some of the major items necessary to run the event. This caused significant logistical and planning difficulties, but these were largely unavoidable because the Board's financial advisors had made it clear that SOL could not commit funds without a guarantee that sufficient income was available to cover all expenses.<sup>26</sup>

3.11 In light of both Leicester's strong commitment to host the Games and the negative outcomes all round that would be involved in disappointing disabled athletes and their families so close to the Games deadline, the City Council had little option but to fill the funding shortfall. During the months in the final lead up to the Games, the full Board held meetings on a six weekly cycle while the Finance Sub-Committee met monthly from January 2008 up to January 2010. Between January 2008 and March 2009 the central issue that dominated these meetings was: how to raise finance the Games in a rapidly shortening period of time as the economic situation worsened. (Financial affairs would finally be wound up by the close of the financial year ending April 2010).

3.12 The Games Organising Committee had been charged with the practical and day-to-day organisation and management of the Games but it was now forced to operate in the context of these acute financial difficulties. The GOC members acted as 'Functional Heads' of the different components that contributed to the successful delivery of the Games. Each member led a team working to key timelines and the committee met on a monthly basis. At these meetings each member reported on the progress made and problems anticipated in their specific area of responsibility. This feedback allowed the team the opportunity to pre-empt any difficulties and discuss appropriate courses of action. The GOC members' individual rate of progress was shared more formally with the rest of the committee through the completion of a monthly checkpoint report, including a risk log and Games timeline. The Games Director argued that this particular feature of overall project management was 'critical in highlighting all key achievements, identifying any potential problems and risks and key actions for the following period of work.'<sup>27</sup> The information routinely provided by Functional Heads was the foundation for the event update which was presented at Board meetings and the Games Director's report on Leicester 2009. A significant feature of the GOC for Leicester was the inclusion on it, for the first time, of a Special Olympics athlete, Lee Penfold, who represented the athletes' perspective on the Games. Lee's input was valuable in that he was able to share his personal experiences with the team in order, 'to improve their knowledge and understanding of the learning disability agenda and the Special Olympics movement'.<sup>28</sup> Here was a clear example – if a

limited one – of a more progressive, integrated system working which was designed to bring more people with learning disabilities directly into key decision-making processes.

3.13 A ‘Games Planning and Coordination Group’ was also formed – the GOC Task Group – in January 2008, which met fortnightly. Led by the Games Director, this group included key GOC members who worked together to plan and develop the process by which all the functional areas would eventually be knitted together to make up ‘a fully-integrated master schedule’ for delivery during Games week. Its first official meeting was on 10 April 2008.<sup>29</sup> For the Games Director the work of this group was especially crucial because, ‘the Games was built on a foundation of pillars: accommodation; catering; sports; events; volunteering and transport.’<sup>30</sup> But the worsening general economic situation, which had resulted in the Board having to reduce the initial budget for the Games, meant that the GOC had to undertake a significant budget reduction exercise to get to a figure that represented the absolute minimum cost of delivering the Games. This was a painful exercise, one which was finally achieved only because there was an underlying commitment by all the partners to a single common cause – honouring the Leicester bid and delivering the Games, despite the financial squeeze and other difficulties. ‘There was belief, and so the positives always overcame the negatives’.<sup>31</sup>

3.14 Because of the impact of the recession the small number of local authority and other staff in Leicester who were in key positions for the delivery of the Games were all required to deal with the sort of detail that might otherwise have been delegated to others. In the months leading up to the Games all those directly involved worked hours well in excess of what might reasonably be expected and in some cases far beyond their formal contractual requirements. If the original sponsorship targets had been attained more staff would have been employed in delivering the Games. Leicester City Council could also have considered further redeployments of staff for specific tasks and periods. This would have meant less time spent by senior staff creatively engineering the delivery of key elements of the programme within a substantially reduced budget whilst limiting the effects of the budget shortfall on the enjoyment of athletes and their families. For the Leicester Games Executive Director, Richard Watson, talking just

before the Games, the combination of the financial downturn and the short run-in for the Games posed extreme difficulties that were successfully addressed in Leicester only because of the extraordinary performance and devotion of local staff:

*The toughest challenges have been financial ones – and time. A two year lead-in was not long enough. I have said to SOGB you need to know who your next city is [to host the Games] with four years to go; two years is not long enough. The team in Leicester was absolutely fantastic; they have been working their socks off to put it together. They are getting a sense of personal achievement out of it, but they'll be absolutely shattered after it too. Nobody's going to let it fail, nobody's going to let it down. Everybody's working extremely hard, but you would have loved to have had more money, more resources, more staff – and more organisation – to pump in their support.<sup>32</sup>*

3.15 A third Leicester SO group that met regularly in the months leading up to the Games was the SOL Legacy Group. The group was chaired by Freda Hussain, the former principal of Moat Community College in Leicester and High Sheriff of Leicestershire. This was a significant and innovative move to ensure the lessons of the Games would be learned and that for the first time there would be a reliable body of knowledge and good practice to hand on to future hosts. SOL decided that the Games should not simply be an event that took place for a week in the city and was then forgotten. In line with many other large events of its kind, it was intended that the Special Olympics' *legacy* – that is, the longer term impact the Games might have on the athletes who took part, their families, the volunteers, the coaches, the organisers and the communities of Leicester – should be investigated and recorded. A central aim here was also to pass on to future hosts useful information about good practice and the experience of managing and delivering the event. The SOL Board, acting through the Legacy Group, commissioned the two universities in the city, the University of Leicester and De Montfort University, to investigate this legacy. Researchers at the International Centre for Sport History and Culture at De Montfort and the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester collaborated to investigate the experiences of those involved in the Games in a two-year study. The project included the appointment of a full time research fellow for twenty-one months to observe meetings, conduct extensive interviews with athletes, families, officials and volunteers. In addition, the joint research team commissioned a three-stage market research project to test

public awareness and responses before, during and after the Games. It is this collective research effort which is embodied in the present report. It was also agreed that the researchers should document the history of Special Olympics in a publication, Susan Barton, *A Sporting Chance* (Leicester, 2009), produced for sale to the public to mark Leicester's second hosting of the Games.

3.16 Members of the academic team undertook the same training on learning disability awareness as some of the volunteers for the Games. In this sense, an important aspect of the research was that the researchers strived to be 'inside' the event in Leicester, as well as developing the necessary research contacts with the organisers and communities of learning disabled athletes and their families. The academic departments involved, the Sociology Department at the University of Leicester and the International Centre for Sport History and Culture at De Montfort University, have gained much from this widening of the traditional perspectives on sports research, something which will ensure that issues of learning disability might be more prominent in future research and teaching in this area. There will, in this sense, be a positive research and teaching legacy as one of the important outcomes of the Leicester Legacy Project. The notion of the 'legacy' of Special Olympics was also regarded as having quite a specific emphasis and relevance for the city of Leicester, where some of the benefits of multi-culturalism and ethnic integration had not always impacted evenly for people with learning disabilities across all of the city's communities. 'There is a definite view among Board members and the organising committee' said Richard Watson just before the Games, 'that it isn't just about a week of sport in July 2009.'

3.17 The diversity of the local communities in Leicester offered both a potential boon and a real challenge to the development of Special Olympics and to the UK learning disability agenda more generally. Making local people from *all* backgrounds more at ease in their understanding of learning disability and in their dealings with people with disabilities was an obvious goal of hosting the Games in Leicester. But there were also wider legacy ambitions in play here, concerning community participation and capacity building in the city, aims that may have

potential for a more lasting impact. Richard Watson, for example, hoped that hosting Special Olympics would mean two key things for the city: increased community awareness, and new local developments in volunteering. Firstly, that:

*People will feel more comfortable about their interaction with people with a learning disability. Potentially there are a large number of spin-offs. Gradually it will dissipate, but for the people involved they remembered 1989 very fondly and they are really looking forward to it [SO Summer Games] coming back. The trick is how we can make it [learning disability] more recognised and understood by those who are not directly involved: those people who don't have a family member with a learning disability or any experience of that ...*

*I [also] hope we will have generated an increase in sports volunteering – 1500 volunteers have been recruited. Volunteering in Leicester is low. I hope we can build on that and retain a large number of volunteers to get involved in other activities, whether sporting or not. The concept of volunteering means people will be trained; they'll be CRB checked, they'll have had experience. They can look forward and put their name down for London [2012] with a CV to be proud of ... Local sports organisations should have a ready-made supply of people who are able and qualified to do that work if they want to continue their involvement in some form of volunteering.<sup>33</sup>*

3.18 The Legacy Committee and the research team were strongly committed to the idea of producing the first history of SOGB as part of hosting the Games. The purpose of this work was both to provide an accurate account of why and how the movement had been founded as well as offering an accessible and well-illustrated book that would appeal to all those directly involved. This involved extensive work by the research fellow in the first nine months of the project. The final product, running to approximately a hundred pages, proved a valuable means of recognizing past achievements as well as providing the research team with a sound foundation on which to build the project. The launch of *A Sporting Chance* on the eve of the Games was something of a local media event that generated further publicity for Special Olympics through press and radio news reports and features, as well as via a prominent window display in Leicester's Central Library. The publication of *A Sporting Chance* was the first stage of the legacy project; the second stage has been the evaluation of the 2009 Games. The Leicester research project has another important legacy to consider: setting a new agenda for

research in sport in which people with learning disabilities are more usually included alongside physically disabled and non-disabled groups.

## 4. The Administrative Process

4.1 The previous section looked at how the Games Organising Committee was established and how it worked, especially in light of the tight economic situation faced by Leicester. This provides the context to look more closely at the administrative process of the Games: the practical, nuts and bolts, day-to-day running of the pre-Games' administration (a fuller, though in places, a rather uneven account of this process can be found in the official *Games Evaluation Report*.) Preparations for running the 2009 Games were mainly overseen by four people: the Games Director, the Director of Sports and Services at SOGB (seconded for six months preceding the Games), the Administration, Information Technology and Communication Director for the Games (seconded in March 2008) and a Sports Facilities *and* Events Director for the Games (seconded in January 2008) – a combining of roles that was to prove extremely onerous. Initially, some of the staff visited the 2005 hosts Glasgow for a day and had what was described as a 'useful' meeting with the Games' director for 2005. Many of the technical advisors were also based in Glasgow and they had all worked on the 2005 Games. Although drawing on this experience was undoubtedly useful for the Leicester team, the relative remoteness of this expertise meant that many of the suggestions, ideas and work from Glasgow had to be fed through the technical advisors, second-hand to the staff, who later tried to apply them in the new location of Leicester. This turned out to be a rather difficult and imprecise process.

4.2 Those involved were generally of the view that they had too little effective preparation for the Special Olympics job they each undertook. As one commented, 'I don't think anybody actually understood the impact and the amount of work involved.' The Games manual for



Special Olympics seemed to give only a basic outline of the job in hand and too 'open to interpretation' and it did not 'give you a good enough flavour' of the job's demands. The overwhelming problem was the sheer volume of work with the unexpected and vast amount of paperwork required a recurring theme:

*I've been in admin a long time but I've never seen the volume of paperwork that was involved with this. It's just sheer volume. Every job you pick you had to times twenty-one for the regions or times, hundreds or thousands for family members. It's thousands of things that have to go out. For athletes and coaches you're talking hundreds or thousands, it's just everything's times however many the volume, it's just massive.*

4.3 The recruitment and co-ordination of various Games officials was a major task which involved responsibility, in one form or another, for five sets of officials. These included: Individual Event Directors; Venue Managers; Volunteer Venue Team Managers; Awards Co-ordinators; and Technical Advisors. In theory, there was to be one of each of these officials for every Games venue, making a total of 105 in all. Some of the Venue Managers were actually employed at the venue and the Games week became part of their job; other Venue Managers plus the other four groups of officials were made up of volunteers. The two most important groups of Games officials were the Individual Event Directors and the Games Technical Advisors. The Individual Event Directors were mainly recruited within four months of Leicester being awarded the Games and all were in post by August 2008. The employee seconded from SOGB was responsible for the appointment of 21 Technical Advisors for each sport (and, as such, was ultimately responsible for the banding and classification of athletes in each sport), although only 15 were actually recruited. In July 2008, a two-day conference was held in Leicester to bring together both the Technical Advisors and the Individual Events Directors (or at least those who had been appointed so far). This gave both sets of officials the opportunity to meet and inspect the venues to be used and is an example of good practice.

4.4 In addition to appointing the officials, there was the task of working in co-operation with Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL) in the recruitment of Volunteer Venue Team Managers (VVTMs) at each of the twenty-one venues. This was a relatively late development, which was

designed to allow the Venue Manager to organise facilities that were jointly run alongside Special Olympics events. Thus, the VVTM was the link person who was in charge of all the volunteers during that particular sporting event. The VVTM also came to monthly training sessions organized at VAL, as well as briefing sessions and information sessions. Those VVTMs who were in post by July 2008 were able to meet the relevant event director and technical advisor. But because the VVTM role was a voluntary one, arrangements here were not completely stable: four VVTMs dropped out one week before the Games were due to begin and one was replaced just 24 hours before the Games commenced. In addition, there was the role of the Awards Manager, which entailed the appointment of twenty-one Awards Coordinators, the running of training sessions for them, getting them to recruit medal bearers and conduct training sessions. On top of organising the facilities, the Sports Facilities and Events Director combination of roles for both recruiting various Games officials and key volunteers with the awards manager role was probably more than even a very motivated and efficient individual could be expected to manage. Of course, it is frequently the case in all organizations that when an unforeseen volume of work arises there is little time to make new arrangements and it can seem easier for the individuals concerned to do the work themselves rather than negotiate for further staff who will in any case will require training when time is of the essence to deliver the event.

4.5 One of the earliest key tasks for the 2009 GOC was to establish the viability of the venues for hosting the Leicester Games. Leicester offered rather different challenges to those posed in Glasgow in 2005, a fact which again had implications for the administrative staff in 2009 and which compounded their already heavy workload. Because it is a much larger city, Glasgow generally offered larger and superior sports facilities to those on offer at Leicester. Crucially, this allowed Glasgow to host, on average, two sports at each venue: the Glasgow Games utilised only eleven venues in total, all of them local authority facilities. Although the Leicester bid document did originally include plans to 'double-up' at some selected venues. In fact, Leicester was forced to use twenty-one venues to host twenty-one different Special Olympic sports. Moreover, the Sports Facilities and Events Director's technical knowledge of local

venues extended only to City Council facilities: she had relatively little detailed knowledge of the schools/colleges or private clubs and companies that would all be needed to host the Games in Leicester.

4.6 In addition to a new gymnastics venue at New College school, a new netball centre at Soar Valley was also used for the 2009 Games. These were, potentially, two impressive new sites to showcase both Leicester and Special Olympics, but they also provided their own logistical problems. This was mainly because these venues were completed with only weeks to spare: netball was ready five weeks before the Games began and the gymnastics venue opened just two weeks before the Opening Ceremony. Although risk management had actually advised *against* assigning SO sports to these particular sites, after regular contact with the relevant site managers it was decided to proceed nevertheless. It was claimed that, with just 24 hours notice, a back-up venue could have been sourced and also properly equipped. In addition to these local difficulties, nine weeks before the Games began it was revealed that the designated cycling venue, a tarmac oval track situated in Leicester's Abbey Park, was unsuitable for competitive use so the complete re-surfacing of the track was eventually approved, at a cost of £30,000. Fifty SO athletes competed in the cycling at Leicester.

4.7 The importance – and real difficulty – of keeping to agreed deadlines was a recurring theme in the 2009 Games administration. In particular, this applied to the submissions for athletes' numbers and entry information, which was the responsibility of SOGB. The deadline for these vital data slipped and slipped. This had 'massive implications' for arrangements in Leicester because it was not until four weeks before the Games were due to open that the final figures were finally received for athlete numbers. These figures were particularly important for the event directors in order to let them know: (a) how many athletes were coming to Leicester, and (b) what combination of sports they had entered. There was considerable frustration from the Sports Facilities and Events Director over the delay in receiving this material as this made the drafting of a budget 'very much a stab in the dark.'

4.8 Because of their lack of experience at working at an event on the scale of Special Olympics Summer Games, the Games administrators knew relatively little about the real cost of necessary infrastructure, such as marquees, seating, portable toilets, accommodation costs and the cost of the required water supply. Instead, they relied on the contacts of the Individual Event Directors and Technical Advisors, especially those attached to national governing bodies. There were also two other major problems concerning the budget. Firstly, the Games budget was held back by the Board until the last week in January 2009 when infrastructure orders had been in place for November 2008. Of course, this was as a result of the overall financial difficulties the Board had to face. However, as a result a number of suppliers were lost because SOL was unable to guarantee payment or enter into contractual agreements without budget confirmation. This also meant that a lot of time was wasted in locating new suppliers – time which was especially valuable given other administrative pressures. Secondly, in addition to delays over agreeing the budget, the City Council ordering system proved problematic. All orders for Special Olympics infrastructural spend had to go through City Council finance procedures. This system functions well in a normal working environment. However, given the nature of the Special Olympics project and the peculiar deadlines it imposed, there needed to be much greater flexibility in this area. The situation was further complicated because the Council had adopted a new finance system on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and this change caused a general backlog, with orders for the Special Olympics often becoming ‘lost’ in the system. As it was recalled, this caused senior administrators to spend ‘whole days’ just before the Games ‘running across from building to building to make sure a purchase order has gone through that you submitted eight weeks ago.’

4.9 One further crucial aspect of the administrators’ roles that had not been fully considered by the Leicester team was the routine dealings with people with learning disabilities. In terms of their own awareness of learning disability issues the Leicester staff effectively learned about protocols on the hoof. As one administrator put it,

*Running a Games, I think, for people with a learning disability is massive because an awful lot of the people with learning disabilities have physical needs as well as sight*

*impairment, hearing impairment. A number of them are wheelchair users. So when you are thinking of things like access and signage and their comfort, there are an awful lot of things to consider.*

Signage for people with learning disabilities was certainly one area that would come in for some criticism during the Leicester Games.<sup>34</sup> A signage manager for transport had been in place but his/her responsibility had been for exterior rather than interior signage and ‘there just wasn’t the time and the resources because there was a cost to everything’.

4.10 The lack of a detailed manual made administrative roles ‘quite creative’. This is obviously beneficial in some respects but such independence also needs to be supplemented by guidance and support from management as well as the benefits of collaborative work, admittedly a difficult balance to strike well. One official summed up this complex question of the importance of relative freedom versus management guidance and collaboration in the following terms:

*Yes, we had a GOC, and there were what we called Task Group meetings, but they very much centred on actions. They were not centred on you as the individual and how you were managing that project area: and what barriers you’ve got and how you are overcoming them ... It was very much [how] I saw the Games Manual. There were 21 events directors. It suggested that the Technical Advisors were appointed to each role. It said what the venues had got to be in terms of size, and I created the rest, really. So it was a quite creative post. But it is very much on a wing and a prayer, and hoping it works.*

4.11 Unsurprisingly perhaps, the intense workload for all the key Games administrators had consequences for their personal lives. We were told that from December 2008 onwards, key staff were working as many as 15-16 hour days and also at weekends. As the Games approached staff were near overwhelmed with telephone calls from Venue Managers, VVTMs and Event Directors, plus calls from the Technical Advisors, mainly with queries about logistics. The pressure continued to build in the week before the Games, when workloads were clearly excessive; other people involved in the 2009 Games would probably have a similar story to tell about pushing themselves to the absolute limits just to ensure that the event went ahead. The fact that the 2009 National Summer Games ran so relatively efficiently – and without any major

problems – was due in no small measure to the efforts of a small number of SOL administrators, which were quite beyond the normal call of duty.

4.12 It would be easy, of course, to conclude that the Leicester Bid should have been much more thought-through and less ambitious, more rational, regarding venues; and that there should have been more management guidance and more collaborative support for those involved full time at SOL; and that there should have been more full-time administrative staff devoted to the day-to-day running of the Games. This latter point though seems a critical one. Given that staffing is a relatively fixed cost, the early secondment of additional staff was clearly desirable assuming that appropriate individuals could be found and spared from their normal duties. An alternative cost-effective strategy might have been to train a small number of appropriately skilled and motivated volunteers – retired managers for example – to assist with the mountain of paperwork. However, training volunteers takes time and they tend to be less reliable than paid employees. Moreover, by the time the problems became acute it was arguably too late to embark on such a process. It cannot be stressed too strongly that these administrative problems have also to be set in a general context: the prevailing financial climate; the fact that Leicester was awarded the Games only two years before they were due to open; that a confirmed Games budget was agreed so late in the process; and the sheer complexity of the event and the special needs of the competitors – all these factors interacted and compounded the inherent organizational problems of such a large participant event.

## **5. Involving the Community**

5.1 In order to project a positive image locally of the National Summer Games 2009 and those involved in it, SOL clearly needed to engage with the community in Leicester and beyond in the months leading up to the staging of the Games. This was important for a number of reasons:

- To maximise the impact of the 'branding' of the event and to emphasise its importance to the city of Leicester and the people of Leicestershire;
- To raise awareness, generally, among Leicester's diverse communities about learning disability and the role of Special Olympics;
- To encourage local people to attend some of the events of Games Week as spectators;
- To help raise funds for people with learning disabilities, the Games and Special Olympics;
- To try to ensure a Games legacy that would have a lasting impact on people in Leicester and the surrounding area

5.2 It seems obvious that the hosts should especially stress in its marketing and promotion the opportunities provide by the SO Summer Games for local people as sports *spectators*. After all, this seems one of the basic positive benefits for citizens, a return on investing public resources in the event. A number of events did offer opportunities of this kind. But actually, these prominent promotional messages in the city about generating local support would cause more than a few difficulties later.<sup>35</sup> By April 2008 a generic branding for the 2009 Games including a Games logo had been designed and was in use and a Games website was also under development.<sup>36</sup> Solly the Lion (developed by Lexis Sport) had been chosen as the Games mascot. In addition to this, Paul Parmenter Marketing were appointed to prepare the Games' marketing strategy, a process which was completed by June 2008.

5.3 Once the strategy was agreed, Holland Alexander UK Ltd took over in August 2008 to deliver the marketing plan in and around the city. Louise Holland led on this for the company and became a key figure on the Games Organising Committee. Her task was to communicate, inspire and achieve customer and supporter 'buy-in' for the project from potential sponsors and donors, local audiences and communities. With almost a year to deliver the marketing strategy, Holland Alexander devised a three-phase approach. Phase One of the campaign (up to

December 2008) was about establishing the brand of SOL in the local and regional community. A number of high-profile events were organised during the summer of 2008 to launch the Games to local people and the business community in Leicestershire. Most prominent of these were the launch of the Lord Mayor's Appeal in May 2008 at the Peepul Centre in Belgrave and the 'One-Year-To-Go' Countdown, on 25 July 2008 in the Leicester Town Hall Square. Phase Two of the campaign (January to April 2009) saw an increase in 'public-facing' events and activities. Marketing and promotion around 'Special Olympics City Year' provided much of the impetus for increasing the momentum on advertising and public engagement. By this point the marketing strategy had to become more structured and more partnership-led, especially given the reduction in the original budget. During Phase Three (May to July 2009) the strategy went into 'full-phase' promotional delivery mode and included a small outdoor marketing campaign.

5.4 The greatest challenge posed to market the Games effectively was undoubtedly the restricted budgets involved due to the need to reduce costs and to deliver what was in reality a 'basic' Games.<sup>37</sup> This meant the cancellation of a significant outdoor advertising campaign for Phase Three and it led instead to a strong emphasis on using creative 'solutions' and third-party partnerships to achieve reduced marketing goals and sustain promotional activities in difficult circumstances. A major aim of the marketing campaign was to challenge preconceived ideas about learning disability held by many people, which also was one of the main aims of SOL. One way this was done was by including in the campaign a group of Special Olympics athletes, who had been to the World Games in Shanghai in 2007, as ambassadors for the 2009 Games. A selection of these ambassadors was present at all public events promoting the Leicester Games and their aim was to help challenge prevailing views about what persons with a learning disability might achieve. The success or otherwise of this strategy – to challenge public attitudes towards people with learning disabilities – will be discussed later in this report when we examine the wider impact of the Games on the people of Leicester.

5.5 One of the most innovative and impressive elements of the entire media campaign around SOL 2009 was arguably the *My Sporting Hero* poster and postcard project. This featured a set of



five images of smiling well-known local sports personalities, each of them holding up a large photograph of a different Leicestershire Special Olympics athlete wearing the medal(s) they had won at the SO World Games in Shanghai, 2007. This simple design also featured the SOL logo and the livery colours associated with the Games branding. The postcards were available to pick up free-of-charge in Leicester City Council offices, leisure and sports centres across the city, while the posters were widely displayed around the Leicester city centre – often on bus shelters – as part of the immediate promotional public engagement campaign for SOL. The prominent sight in public venues of an internationally known but also decidedly local sporting star – ex-Leicester Tigers and England World Cup- winning captain and now England rugby union head coach, Martin Johnson, for example – directly supporting or even celebrating a Special Olympics athlete, seemed both highly effective and even slightly subversive. Here was a simple expression of sporting respect, one displayed and shared between athletes, and one which often stretched across sports and genders as well as challenging the ‘disability divide’ in sport. Admittedly, of course, it was probably the larger image of the well-known sporting celebrity that initially caught the public gaze and first drew the viewer in. By associating a Special Olympic athlete alongside a well-known and admired sporting figure, the campaign heightened public awareness of the importance and achievements of those who would attend the Leicester Games.

5.6 By the summer of 2009 the city centre showed some signs of the ‘dressing’ for Games Week – though we will see later some public resistance to this local advertising of the Games – and the budget cuts did reduce the numbers of banners and posters used. It was also the case that a number of other events were also advertised simultaneously in the city centre, something which offered some potential brand ‘confusion’ in the lead up to the 2009 Games. SOL also followed aspects of the national lead of SOGB and appointed over 300 local ambassadors for the 2009 Games, including celebrities, sports people and prominent representatives of the different communities in Leicester.<sup>38</sup> The two 2009 Games Patrons were Martin Johnson and Gary Lineker (ex-Leicester City and now BBC sports presenter); the Games Cultural Patron was the Leicestershire-based singer and entertainer Engelbert Humperdinck. A range of other local

sportsmen and women were also involved. Representing the different ethnic and religious communities in Leicester, among many others, were: Rabbi Schmuel Pink; the Right Reverend Tim Stevens Bishop of Leicester; Parvin Ali; Manzoor Moghal and Lady Gretton (Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire). Special Olympics GB athletes and former athletes enrolled as ambassadors included: Lee Penfold; Rachel Jarvis; Zara Jurenko; Fleur O'Donohue; Tom Styles; and Donna Bishop. The 'celebrity' promotion of sporting events has its limits, of course, but this association of prominent people with the Games was undoubtedly important in gaining additional publicity and raising awareness about the event in the wider community. SO athlete Zara Jurenko reported on her ambassadorial role that, 'I had to go to public events, see all the people, talk about the Games and go round everywhere, as well.' Zara thought her role was important, not least because the public 'could see who's taking part in the Games.'<sup>39</sup> She took the opportunity in her ambassador's role to meet a wide range of people who often knew little or nothing about Special Olympics or learning disability in order to get the message across that: 'This will happen and I'm glad it's in Leicester.' Zara reported that she encountered, 'a really positive attitude to the Games.'<sup>40</sup> Another key athlete ambassador was Lee Penfold, whose personal and professional development through the experience of being an SO ambassador led to him making a large number of radio and television appearances in news interviews about the Games. He then helped co-host the Leicester Opening Ceremony with, among others, Leicester City's Alan Birchenall.

5.7 An important local and national advocate for the Games was Board member and ex-headteacher Steve White. White had begun his educational career working with children with learning disabilities, and he also had extensive local media contacts because of his work on sport in Leicester. Not only did he support the athletes as media ambassadors, but he also kept stressing the importance, in both marketing and awareness-raising terms, of getting the *athlete's* voice across to the public: 'The best way [of raising public awareness] I feel is for the voices of the Special Olympians to be heard. But most of them need some moral support and a little training in terms of how you can best put your points across.'<sup>41</sup>

5.8 Since the Games concluded, some of the athlete ambassadors involved in SO 2009 have continued their role in promoting sport for people with learning disabilities at key events such as the launch of the Special Olympics Young Athlete programme with then Minister for Sport, Gerry Sutcliffe in September 2009, attending the Leicester Mercury Sports Awards Ceremony in February 2010, and meeting with then Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell when the latter visited Leicestershire in May 2010. Subsequently, as we have indicated, Lee Penfold secured a short internship in the newsroom at ITV in Birmingham in the summer of 2010, the first time the television company has offered a supported placement of this kind. These developments – all small in their own right – add up to important dimensions of the legacy of the city of Leicester hosting Special Olympics in 2009. The 2009 Games gained considerable media coverage and kept the life situation and capacities of the athletes in the spotlight, particularly in Leicester, via two major charitable appeals which were launched during 2008 and 2009. These were, respectively, the Lord Mayor’s Appeal ‘08/’09<sup>42</sup> and the Leicester Mercury’s SO campaign, *Wear it with Pride*.<sup>43</sup> SO ambassadors, supported by volunteer collectors, attended many local cultural events in Leicester to raise money for Special Olympics.<sup>44</sup> The total raised in support of the Games by these various events during the year of the Lord Mayor’s appeal came to over £108,000. At the end of her term of office as Lord Mayor, Councillor Manjula Sood was appointed as Community Ambassador for the Games. As a result of her work in this capacity she has since also become a community ambassador for the national sports body, Sport England. Finally, SOL also organised a number of Special Olympics Roadshow events, at community and sports centres and students’ unions around the city of Leicester and the county.

5.9 In order to raise awareness of learning disabilities among local young people and children and to involve them more directly in the 2009 Games, a Special Olympics Leicester pack of learning resources and teaching materials, *SO Let’s Learn*, was produced to celebrate the events of July 2009. The development and production of this pack was co-ordinated by the Schools Development Support Agency in Leicester, led by Pete Chilvers. Starting in the autumn term of 2008, twenty teachers volunteered to take part in the project. This educational initiative, based

on Special Olympics, was funded by Leicester City Council Sports Services (to the tune of £7,000) in return for publicity about the free swimming for under-16s initiative, and also by the Leicestershire Sports Partnership, which provided £2,000 in return for an advertisement for its work.<sup>45</sup> The shortfall and in-kind contributions of labour, writing and production were all provided by the Schools Development Support Agency. Out of this very modest resource, by April 2009 a thousand copies of the resource pack had been produced and two packs were sent to every Leicester school.<sup>46</sup> Each school in Leicestershire and Rutland was sent one copy. *SO Let's Learn* was professionally produced in the distinctive bright yellow, blue and orange livery of SOL in order to make it eye-catching and attractive to children and to connect it directly to the Summer Games.

5.10 The aim of *SO Let's Learn* was to provide support for those local schools and colleges that had chosen to use the Summer Games of 2009 as an inspirational context for learning about sport and learning disability and for student activity in these related areas. Leicester was well aware of the rather more extensive educational ambitions of London 2012, and this had its influence on the 2009 Games. The longer-term aim of the Leicester package was to engage with both local children and their parents more directly in the learning disability agenda. 'Start with the young', was the credo assumed at Leicester, according to the Games Executive Director, Richard Watson:

*If you can change attitudes, behaviours and perceptions at that sort of age it is easier. It is important educationally that people understand more about learning disability and that is the time to get people interested. That's why we had an education programme ... Some of the schools have really taken on board the message. We hope lots of young people will be involved in the Opening Ceremony and supporting events and coming along to see [SO]. Children often bring parents along – that happens within a number of our activities. Parents get involved because their children want to do things; maybe we can build on that.*<sup>47</sup>

#### *National media coverage*

5.11 The general media strategy of the SOL team was primarily focused on the not-inconsiderable task of trying to promote the Games to the press and broadcast media as an

authentic national sporting event – albeit one with particularly strong ‘human interest’ journalistic appeal.<sup>48</sup> The involvement of high profile Games ambassadors were one of the keys to securing some of this national coverage, with at least 33 news items and features on Special Olympics appearing in national newspapers, ranging from the *Daily Star*, *Daily Express* and the *Guardian*, as well as features on television’s Eurosport and Sky Sports News channels.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, but perhaps predictably, the Games were more likely to be reported in national newspapers as news, rather than as part of their general *sports* coverage. At least one major exception to this trend was a near full-page article in the *Daily Mirror*, 24 June 2009, written by the newspaper’s chief sports columnist, Oliver Holt. It featured an interview with Lee Penfold under the heading (and picture of Lee), ‘Olympic Hero Lee shows cynics why sport is so special to us all’. Holt contrasted the overly-commercial and competitive ethos of professional sport with the attractions of Special Olympics, arguing that ‘The Special Olympics makes you realise how far professional sport has drifted away from what it should be.’ Holt admitted that he did not know what Special Olympics was until he met Penfold. He also quoted Damon Hill, a Games Ambassador whose own son, Ollie, has Down’s Syndrome. Hill, in highlighting the philosophy of the Special Olympics, argued that:

*Showing that you’ve got that competitive spirit is all that matters. You put it into the context of the fact that everybody’s limited ... You fulfill yourself by exploring those limits. We should be looking at what people can do, not what they can’t do. If you don’t create the event then people can’t take part. The Special Olympics is setting up an opportunity for everyone to have a go.*<sup>50</sup>

5.12 From the outset, the local daily newspaper in the city the *Leicester Mercury* had offered strong support for the city hosting the Games and this very upbeat tone was generally maintained until July 2009. On reflection, it was a position which was crucial in the face of the distressing economic news that would emerge later about the Games’ funding shortfall. The shortfall in sponsorship funding support for the 2009 Games predictably made front page news in the *Mercury*, on 26 March 2009, with the headline: ‘Olympics is £1m short of target’. But when it became apparent that no major commercial sponsors would support the Games and that Leicester City Council would have to agree to underwrite the event, the *Leicester Mercury* opted to lead local public opinion positively in its support for this emergency strategy. This was

at a time when the worsening economic situation had led some local people to be highly critical of aspects of what they regarded as ‘excessive’ local government spending. The newspaper gave its support to the Council, in the following, unequivocal, terms:

*There will no doubt be some people who question whether it is right for Leicester City Council to be spending up to £1 million on ensuring the Special Olympics goes ahead. The alternative, however, is surely unthinkable. If the event had to be scrapped or drastically scaled down, it would be a huge blow not only to the participants and their supporters but also to the prestige of the games and Leicester as the host city.*<sup>51</sup>

5.13 In some respects, the view expressed here was perhaps the uncomfortable one that the Council had no real alternative but to commit public funds to the Games. How could the city of Leicester – or indeed Special Olympics – survive any other option at this late stage? But no blame was accorded to the Council in the face of the wider financial difficulties in play, and over which it had little or no effective control. Subsequently, the *Leicester Mercury* was critical of the failure of the consultants, *First Rights*, to bring in any significant sponsorship, and especially of the terms of the City Council’s contract with the company. The agreement between SOL and *First Rights* promised a 15% commission on any sponsorship attracted above £10,000 (below this amount any commission counted as a donation). This agreement covered sums raised from any source, even if *First Rights* had had little or nothing to do with those specific negotiations. *First Rights* was also reported to have been paid £44,500 out of the £250,000 given by Leicester City Council to the SOL Board for set-up costs.<sup>52</sup>

5.14 Although this specific coverage of the role of consultants was quite negative, paradoxically the publicity involved in the sponsorship question also ensured a positive: that Special Olympics Leicester remained on the local media agenda and thus in the public eye. The emphasis here was also less on any alleged lack of competence on the part of SOL and more on the potential plight of athletes and families who now required – and were getting – local public support. Letters soon appeared in the paper from local people and these largely demonstrated the Leicester public’s continuing support for the Games and also support for the city authorities acting as host, even though some correspondents were clearly disgruntled concerning the

failure to raise sufficient sponsorship via commercial routes. One reader, for example, lamented the general direction taken regarding SOL and the funding for the Games – perhaps underestimating the sums required – which meant, in this view, that too little focus had been given to the potential of the use of more *local* initiatives: ‘This has meant [local] organisations being given limited opportunity to become essential partners for the eventual success of these Games.’<sup>53</sup> Of course, the Games provided the *Mercury* with a lot of attractive local copy, especially human interest stories concerning athletes, which was ultimately in the interest of both parties. The *Mercury*’s commitment to the Games was powerfully reinforced with its ‘30-day Countdown’ to the Games, a series of stories about Special Olympics which started on 25 June. Each day thereafter there was a press story featuring the build-up, whether in terms of an athlete’s preparation or the organisation of the Games.

#### *Local radio coverage*

5.15 *BBC Radio Leicester*, too, played a highly supportive role in generating coverage and interest in the Games. Prior to the Games the station followed four Leicestershire SO athletes, Rachel Jarvis, Zara Jurenko, Christine Lewis and Tom Styles, in their different preparations for the competition.<sup>54</sup> The four made regular appearances on the local airways, broadcast right across Leicestershire and Rutland. The aim here was to send out messages about what Special Olympics means to those involved and what athletes can achieve in sporting competition and in personal terms from their involvement in the Games,

#### *SOL 2009 communications*

5.16 In addition to the national and regional media generated around the Games, SOL produced its own periodic news sheet, *SO Let’s Go*, which was distributed free of charge around Leicester City Council venues and community centres during the two-year period leading up to July 2009. This featured stories and information about Special Olympics aimed more specifically at the local population. This local material was designed to include local people more in the build-up to the Games and to inspire them to become directly involved in its production, either as volunteers or spectators, and to raise general awareness of Special Olympics and issues around

learning disability. Leicester City Council's own regular free monthly newspaper, the *Leicester Link*, also ran regular features on the Games during the months preceding it and provided local citizens with a retrospective overview afterwards. The SOL marketing campaign also made use of digital new media with a SOL website and SOL *YouTube* channel. The *YouTube* channel was managed by two volunteer filmmakers who also filmed at SOL events in the lead up to the Games, at the opening ceremony and at the various venues and competitions during Games Week. Their work was also available for viewing during the Games and a compilation DVD was produced by these young innovators for sale after the Games.

## **6. Summary of the Games Build-up, Local Expectations & Future Prospects**

6.1 The decision to bid to host Special Olympics GB Summer Games was enthusiastically embraced by officers and politicians in Leicester as, what might have appeared to be at that early stage, a relatively low-risk and 'high-return' sporting and cultural festival for the city but one which had a national relevance. The Minister for Sport had even commented about the hosting of Special Olympics in Leicester that it signaled 'the start of a decade of sport for Britain'<sup>55</sup>, a period which would include hosting the Commonwealth Games, the Olympic Games, the IRB rugby union World Cup and culminating, it was hoped at the time, in England acting as hosts for the FIFA World Cup finals in 2018. This was auspicious company. For local councillors such as Andy Connelly who have responsibility for delivering an offer to local people about leisure and culture in Leicester, hosting Special Olympics was, more pragmatically, part of a wider trend about the growing collective confidence in Leicester around the provision of culture and sport. Other recent signs of this included the opening of the £60 million Curve theatre, the £11 million Football Foundation investment in local football facilities in the city, the recent promotion of Leicester City FC back into the second tier of the English game, and the impressive new multi-million pound Caterpillar stand at the Leicester Tigers' Welford Road ground.<sup>56</sup>



6.2 Added to this, there seemed to be general public support for hosting a major sporting event in the city and the sums involved to be raised in staging the 2009 Games were not excessive, especially given the scale of the event. In any case, there were more than reasonable initial expectations in Leicester – and in SOGB – that this so-called ‘third member’ of the Olympic family could, and would, draw private sector – and possibly central government – funding support. Where was the down-side? This assumption, about funding and sponsorship, was made not only because of the nature of the athletes and families involved – Special Olympics’ ‘good cause’ status – but also because of what were perceived to be the event’s attractive wider Olympic credentials, especially in the run-up to London 2012. Moreover, the potential returns for local citizens and the city from hosting the 2009 GB Summer Games seemed powerful and entirely in line with the place pride, well-being, public interest and inclusivity remit of local government in the UK. Again, it was actually rather difficult, initially at least, to identify the arguments *against* bidding to be the 2009 Games hosts. This issue of the development of local awareness about learning disabilities was one of the hoped-for outcomes for Andy Connelly:

*There is that stigma [about learning disability] and I think we need to remove that stigma. That is one of the most important impact the Games can have ... The legacy will be that [Leicester] people will have a better understanding of people with learning disabilities. I think that is part of the journey since we first won the bid. There was a lot of ignorance and I think a lot of that has been whittled away. I will be disappointed if people are not more understanding after the Games ...*<sup>57</sup>

6.3 However, rather than turning out to be the relatively straightforward funding and logistical project it might have first appeared, organising and hosting Special Olympics in Leicester in 2009 actually turned out to be a major challenge for those directly involved, one posed over a very short period of time and in incredible testing economic circumstances. In the view of the 2009 hosts, at least, this highly uncertain experience offered convincing evidence that a new, possibly more statutory, direction was probably needed to ensure future Games’ hosts and the long-term future of the Summer Games – and perhaps the Special Olympics movement itself. To make it a success – indeed to host the Games at all in 2009 – required enormous

commitment and some considerable sacrifice from the Leicester staff involved in its delivery and a substantial financial investment which ultimately came from the citizens of Leicester via the City Council. It might be argued locally that this was a price well worth paying for the benefits of hosting the Summer Games in July 2009 and indeed that there is a strong case for public funding for the event that combines local and national investment. But it is also rather difficult to escape the view that Special Olympics may have reached something of a turning point in Leicester in 2009, at least in terms of some quite fundamental structural questions about the size, funding and management of future GB Summer Games.

6.4 We note, in closing, however, the advice on funding given by SOGB in a slim document covering information for prospective bidders on the organization and finances for the 2013 Games. The few lines devoted here to the required budget for the next Summer Games (in 2013) seem, in our view, to take too little account of the severe funding problems experienced in 2009 or of the projected bleak financial outlook in the UK. *'The Games should be self-financing'* argues SOGB. And then:

*The Games require a major fundraising effort which is the responsibility of the Games Trust/Board. The host City Council should expect to underwrite any shortfall of the Games budget should sponsorships and fundraising efforts fail to reach the required budget targets. The budget for the National Summer Games in 2013 should be estimated in the region of £3-4 million of which currently approximately, £1.1 million will come from Special Olympics GB via entry fees and grants.<sup>58</sup>*

There is very little here about the potential difficulties likely to be involved in raising funds for Special Olympics in 2013 and it seems likely that any city hosting Special Olympics Summer Games will probably have to invest up to around £2 million to make the Games work, even at a basic level, unless new forms of sponsorship can be unearthed in the tough economic climate of the next two to three years.

## PART II: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GAMES

### 7. Games Opening Ceremony 25 July 2009

7.1 The 8<sup>th</sup> Special Olympics Great Britain National Summer Games ran in Leicester between Saturday 25 July and Friday 31 July 2009. The Opening Ceremony took place in the evening of Saturday 25 July at the Walkers Stadium, the home of Leicester City FC and the central location of the Games Village. The main hosts for the evening were Leicester City's PR man Alan Birchenall and Sameena Ali-Khan of ITV Central News, assisted by SOGB athletes. Over 20,000 people – made up mainly of locals and family members and friends – almost filled three sides of the Walkers Stadium, with the North (Kop) End of the stadium taken up by a big screen which offered close-ups of the key figures on the central stage. This crowd was strikingly different from the usual football or sports crowd – many people were guests of the event. Impressionistically, at least, it included far more family groups (parents with young children) and certainly more (older) females; but also more people, in certain areas of the stadium, drawn from Leicester's diverse local black and South Asian communities.<sup>59</sup>

7.2 Additionally, in terms of ethnicity the performing artists, sections of the crowd and especially the SO volunteers drew a considerable contrast with the bulk of the SO athletes at the Games. In some cases, entire large squads of athletes lacked any BME representation – only the very small London SO contingent offered real signs of ethnic diversity in this respect. This fact is likely to reflect, in part, the relative lack of purchase of the Special Olympics enterprise in high-density, urban areas where minority communities and multi-culturalism are more commonplace in Britain. But it perhaps also confirms the relatively low levels of general success of support and care organizations in accessing people from ethnic minority communities who have family members with learning disabilities.<sup>60</sup>

7.3 Usefully for the crowd, throughout the athletes' parade a selection of the Games ambassadors and others were interviewed on camera and their images displayed on the big screen so that everyone present could see and hear their response to events around them. This offered spectators an attractive and immediate connection with the event and its characters, even when proceedings in the stadium seemed in danger of slowing to a near halt. Almost every group of athletes in the parade also had a turn to appear on the big screen to add to the enjoyment of parents and family members. It is almost impossible, of course, to fully rehearse a huge event of this kind. As a result, it is very difficult to assess how long it might take to get all the athletes into the stadium and seated. There is an understandable concern that Special Olympics should ape the Olympic Games in having all athletes take part in the opening parade, but these Olympic Games athletes do not usually sit in the stadium. Opening ceremonies at Special Olympics events can take extended periods of time and that was certainly the case here because it took a considerable time to get all the athletes into the stadium. Tim Shriver CEO of Special Olympics International and son of the SO founder, Eunice Kennedy Shriver and surprise VIP guest, the then UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, also appeared pitch-side to meet and greet the athletes as they arrived in the stadium and were waiting to take their seats. The then Minister for the Olympics Tessa Jowell made her appearance, adding good wishes for the athletes and supporters and perhaps in the minds of some spectators and the organizers making an important symbolic bridge between Special Olympics 2009 and London 2012.

7.4 Future hosts might usefully consider beginning with most of the athletes seated in the stadium with the regions standing up in turn to receive the applause of the crowd as a smaller representative group for each region enters the stadium. This would reduce the time needed for the event. With all the athletes finally seated – by now some considerable time behind schedule – messages of support for the event and the athletes appeared on the big screen in pre-recorded contributions from some nationally and internationally-recognised celebrities and sportsmen – the iconic Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar among them. Following this, the programme of entertainment for the assembled crowd and competitors finally began. There were contributions from gymnasts, BMX cyclists, from a group of dancers with learning

disabilities, from the poet Jean Binta Breeze, and from the music group the New Beautiful South.

7.5 Tim Shriver offered a stirring speech to welcome the athletes, families and other visitors to the Leicester Games and to provide some wider context for the staging of the 2009 GB Games. More speeches followed, from Ted Cassidy the chair of SOL 2009, the Lord Mayor of Leicester Roger Blackmore, and from the Leader of Leicester City Council, Ross Willmott. Each of these men had a well-defined local agenda and they were clearly enthused by Special Olympics: in front of a large crowd they stuck largely to their scripts. But the balance between the spoken word and other forms of entertainment is a difficult one to get right for this kind of audience, especially when time becomes a significant variable. Rather more flexibility and brevity was probably needed at this stage to try to return the event closer to its original schedule and to keep the audience – especially perhaps the athletes and younger people – fully engaged.

7.6 The main features of the evening were, firstly, an eye-catching performance by the Anjali Dance Company for people with learning disabilities, a group which, ‘exists to change global thinking about who can dance and demonstrate new possibilities by showcasing the creative potential of people with learning disabilities’.<sup>61</sup> And, secondly, *Wonderland* – or rather ‘*One’derland* (a pun meant to echo the ‘One Leicester’ theme) – a remarkable carnival pageant created by the London-based Mahogany Arts. This internationally known arts company specializes in designing and creating large-scale kinetic sculptures utilizing the human body in the art form of Masquerade. For Special Olympics Mahogany had worked on the theme of *the diversity of Leicester* with small groups of young people from Leicester schools and also adults from the Leicester Caribbean Carnival to make the 200 or so costumes needed for the final performance. Local adults and children from the Belgrave Carers Group, Addict Dance, and Steps (a disabled teenagers dance group) also worked with three choreographers from Mahogany to create the final dance. The Philharmonia Orchestra had worked with young people with a learning disability to create a musical fanfare for the opening ceremony and

young disabled musicians from the Richard Attenborough Centre in Leicester had combined with composer Geraldine Connor to write melodies for each section of the performance.<sup>62</sup>

7.7 This extraordinarily colourful display of fairytale and fantasy, featuring performers from many different cultures and backgrounds, was both captivating and atmospheric especially as it was initially timed to take place just as darkness was beginning to fall. The skilful spot-lighting and musical accompaniment and the huge constructed creatures manipulated by dancers inside, held the crowd transfixed and occasionally drew gasps as each new character entered the arena. The big stadium screen focused on the detail of these evolving scenes that eventually filled almost the entire Walkers' Stadium pitch. The key performers wore breathtaking, mechanically animated costumes, which were re-used in the SO Closing Ceremony and in future parades, including the forthcoming Leicester Caribbean Carnival and the Notting Hill Carnival in 2009. The local legacy impact here was that these impressive and rather beautiful costumes – indeed the whole pageant – had been created, in part, by local young people and adults in workshops led by the artists from Mahogany and by musicians. Unfortunately, many local people who had turned up as spectators with children much earlier in the evening to support Special Olympics and presumably to view this carnival spectacular had, by now, decided to leave the event simply because of the delays and the lateness of the hour.

7.8 Comments we collected later from spectators, delegation heads and the families of athletes oscillated somewhat between their obvious admiration for the fantastic scale and content of the event and some real concern about its rather inordinate length, at over four hours. This was certainly too long a period to expect younger spectators to remain fully engaged and it also provided for a very late night and transport problems for some SO athletes and their families. On BBC Radio Leicester's 'Your guide to the Games' a news reporter was asked to sum up the Opening Ceremony and in a word replied: 'Colour'.<sup>63</sup> A spectator who rang in to the radio station reflected both the delays and the excitement of the evening when he told listeners that he had, 'No voice left, my hands hurt from clapping, there's no air left in my air horn and that's

just the start!’<sup>64</sup> For one of the celebrity hosts of the ceremony, Sameena Ali-Khan of ITV Central News, it had clearly been a very special occasion, one which reflected well both on the city of Leicester and on the Special Olympics concept and movement:

*It was a phenomenal event to showcase the achievements of the athletes and also a wonderful way to reflect the cultural diversity of Leicester and the East Midlands. I thoroughly enjoyed hosting the whole evening and, like the crowds, being wowed by the displays that just got better as the evening progressed. The feeling of pride and optimism I had after that night stayed with me for days. It was magical!*<sup>65</sup>

**Table 7.1: Visitor & Local Comments on the Opening Ceremony (OC)**

Generally Positive	Generally Negative
<i>‘Spectacular’</i>	<i>‘OC – problems in getting people back to accommodation.’</i>
<i>‘Fantastic, much better than Glasgow.’</i>	<i>‘Bus situation – problem.’</i>
<i>‘Brilliant turn-out at opening ceremony.’</i>	<i>‘Lot of waiting about; lot of waiting for buses at OC.’</i>
<i>‘I went to see OC – fantastic, brilliant.’</i>	<i>‘[It] could have started earlier.’</i>
<i>‘Enjoyed the OC but seating athletes [was] very slow.’</i>	<i>‘OC [was] very good but didn’t see why it took 2 hours to sit everyone down.’</i>
<i>‘Enjoyed OC thoroughly, but had to leave early to catch a bus.’</i>	<i>‘OC – tannoy system was appalling.’</i>
<i>‘Excellent, enjoyed everything; costumes – fabulous. One of the best I’ve seen.’</i>	<i>‘Got bored because you couldn’t organize it.’</i>
<i>‘Walker’s Stadium was swinging – excellent, amazing; OC – really good’</i>	<i>‘OC, not a big deal compared to Glasgow where there were more famous people/ bands, etc.’</i>
<i>‘Fantastic; met a few stars.’</i>	<i>‘OC very good, but went on too long.’</i>
<i>‘OC – brilliant.’</i>	<i>‘No need for councilors to waffle on late at night; should have let athletes go and then do the speeches.’</i>
<i>‘OC – Mahogany [were] fantastic; out of this world. Ground just the right size. Fantastic atmosphere; staff at ‘OC [were] brilliant.’</i>	<i>‘Poetry – would have gone over the athletes’ heads – too deep.’</i>
<i>‘Magical – really get things off to a great start.’</i>	<i>‘Went on far too long; athletes needed to get to bed for the next day.’</i>
<i>‘OC – brilliant; Mahogany [were] brilliant; enjoyed that bit the most.’</i>	<i>‘OC – seating needed sorting out.’</i>
<i>‘OC – Brilliant. Councillors could have cut the speeches at the end; waffled on. It took away from the big event, the boring speeches. But the rest of it was great.’</i>	<i>‘SJAB seemed to be quite busy; autistic children tend not to wait [so] unable to see some acts.’</i>
<i>‘OC – Fantastic!’</i>	

*'OC [was] wonderful. Only downside [was I] had little children and had to leave early, but thoroughly enjoyed it.'*  
*'Great, even though we had to leave early.'*

*Source: SO Legacy Research, 2009*

7.9 The Games Opening Ceremony certainly *was* a 'magical' experience for many of those who had managed to stay the distance, but the next Games host also surely also needs to learn the necessary lessons from the experience of 2009. The Opening Ceremony is probably the key event of the whole week specifically for engaging with local people and for celebrating all the Special Olympics athletes and their supporters. It is required to be 'spectacular' and it also sets the tone for the week's activities. Finally, it also offers an opportunity for artists and musicians to work with people with learning disabilities and to show their commitment to the Games in front of a huge audience. Leicester pulled out all the stops in its staging of an extravaganza and in attracting major VIPs and a very good crowd to the Opening Ceremony. But the event got bogged down in the athletes' parade and civic speeches and was allowed to stray too far beyond its programme deadline as a result. Inevitably, this impacted on the experience of many people in the crowd, as the interview material we collected from over 100 locals and visitors to Leicester collated in Table 7.1 shows.

## **8. The Week of Games Competition**

8.1 The following brief accounts of some the events of Games Week are a selective and largely impressionistic account based on the observations of the Legacy Project Research team and some fieldwork interviewing at different SO events. These interviews were with family members and visitors and local spectators. Members of the team were unable to be present at all events, on every day, of course, but their observations and experiences, recorded mainly as field notes and interview material, give an impression of what it was like to be present at some



of the key sporting competitions. Table 8.1 shows the sports at which short interviews were conducted either with family members or visitors. We also conducted surveys of SO families and others who took part in the event.

**Table 8.1: On-site Interviews with Locals, Family Members & Visitors 26-31 July 2009**

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Locals</b>
Football	11	8	3
Equestrian	12	8	4
Bowls	5	5	0
Cricket	5	2	3
Athletics	15	6	9
Boccia	5	5	0
Netball	6	3	3
Badminton	11	7	4
Swimming	14	12	2
Basketball	5	3	2
Judo	7	4	3
Cycling	1	0	1
Weightlifting	4	4	0
Gymnastics	2	1	1
Golf	6	4	2
Tennis	7	3	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>41</b>

*Source: SO Legacy Research, 2009*

8.2 On the Sunday evening the first mini ‘crisis’ occurred. An emergency meeting was called between Games Director Steve Humphries and the families and social organisers for SO. This was to discuss early problems concerning the admission and management of spectators at the Braunstone Leisure Centre, the venue for the *swimming*. The initial plans outlined in the Leicester bid was that up to *four* sports might be staged at the Leisure Centre, but it was having problems dealing with the one sport allocated. There were only 200 spectator seats on site but there was many more competitors and family members who had to be accommodated at

various moments. Because of the nature of this activity, swimming is one of the most popular of all the Special Olympics sports, but the current numbers involved probably requires an aquatics venue which is rather larger and with more spectator capacity than even a premier local authority facility. It was difficult enough to accommodate all those family members and supporters who wanted to attend, but it was virtually impossible for non-affiliated local people to support this sport at this venue – despite local publicity urging people to attend as spectators. The families and friends of SO athletes alone were crammed in here, often uncomfortably.<sup>66</sup> They complained about requiring tickets to gain entry only for specific parts of the programme, but given the limited spectator capacity there was really no alternative. Table 8.2 reports on some of the problems at the swimming venue from our on-site interviews.

**Table 8.2: Selected Comments from Visitors on Swimming Event**

Positive	Negative
<i>'Facilities – very good; only problem – seating for spectators, but tried to keep family entertained in family tent'</i>	<i>'Facilities – too small; lack of information when here; badly thought up; lack of flexibility re: spectating'</i>
<i>'Facilities fine – just the lack of seating'</i>	<i>'Transport – absolutely terrible – have to take taxis; lot of legwork. Everything is expensive'</i>
<i>'Impressed with how they are keeping children amused'</i>	<i>'Spectators' Gallery could have been a bit bigger'</i>
<i>'Good pool, but too few spaces for spectators'</i>	<i>'Wrong times for the programme: missed an event (apart from that everything's been spot on)'</i>
<i>'Sceptical at first about having a marquee - but very good'</i>	<i>'Not organized! – could only get 2 tickets where there were 3 family members; only 2 allocated per family'</i>
<i>'Facilities very good, bar the queuing'</i>	<i>'More details required when swimmers are swimming; notification required of when people are on in the morning'</i>
	<i>'Tickets – only 2 per family but people without one get in!'</i>
	<i>'Medal ceremony organization – lack of communication; missed medal ceremony.'</i>
	<i>'Pool quite small; not very well set-up for people with SEN in general; queuing too long'</i>
	<i>'When you've got 200 seats; you've got no choice. Family tent – ok but not a lot to do, bar watch</i>

*swimming on TV'*

*'Just not big enough; medal ceremony – dangerous – not good at all; I didn't know son was awarded a medal'*

*'Could have had more to do in sports hall for the athletes e.g. table football; Sky TV'*

**Source: SO Legacy Research, 2009**

8.3 There were a number of other cases of local people being disappointed by restricted access to the Games. At the gymnastics event the available seating was largely full of family spectators and a couple of our local interviewees complained that they had travelled hoping to see the gymnastics but they could not be admitted. To be fair, by Tuesday 28 July the SO volunteers at the swimming and other events were getting into their stride and there were no more serious spectator issues, just orderly queuing with tickets for seating. The volunteers at swimming had to be very organised indeed due to the complexity in moving swimmers and supporters around because of the lack of space on the site. Athletes sat in the leisure centre sports hall with a big screen to watch proceedings while they waited for their turn to swim, but (as can be seen in Table 8.2) some family members complained there was little else to offer distraction. There was at least a marquee available now for families to use (though bad weather proved challenging here) and also the use of a nearby school hall. The swimming event clearly raised some of the most difficult logistical and communication problems of all sports at the Games, with information about timing for medal ceremonies also proving confusing for some visitors, and it produced probably the most negative responses at all sports from both family members and locals.

8.4 The first day of sporting 'competition' was one that was actually devoted in many sports mainly to the assessment of athletes for their allocation to appropriate divisional groups. It is this banding by performance and capability that makes the Special Olympics' concept almost unique in the world of sport. Athletes compete at what is judged to be their own level of competence, with the emphasis on participation, equality of competition and reaching personal

goals rather than simply on winning. This approach sometimes matches older and younger competitors in direct competition but interestingly, however, traditional sporting divisions by *gender* largely survive this general emphasis on participation and matching up athletes by their capabilities, rather than by any other characteristics. SO athletes are encouraged to be the best they themselves can be, rather than the best compared to all the other athletes in their event, as tends to be the case in most mainstream sport. In most individual SO sports – badminton is a good example here – but also in many team sports, there were several divisions of competition established and thus multiple gold medals awarded, at least one for each band. Every competing athlete received a medal of some kind and sometimes a band or division might include just three athletes or teams.

8.5 The importance of honesty and *fairness* in registering performance and making accurate assessments of athletes for divisional purposes in SO is made very clear in the 2009 Head of Delegation manual discussion of the ‘Honest Effort Rule’, which also carries a rather stern warning about the masking of performance.<sup>67</sup> It is highly unusual for athletes to be disqualified under this rule, but such processes of making reasonable accurate and acceptable divisions are hugely important for maintaining the personal commitment of athletes and coaches and for guarding the integrity of the Special Olympics ethos of valuing and rewarding *all* competitors. But making divisions is not an exact science, and the Games also represent serious sporting competition for many of those involved. Inevitably, some parents and other family members – and the athletes themselves – complain that competitors have been mis-categorized or banded ‘too high’. This meant that in some cases – the football tournament in Leicester was one obvious example – we were told by supporters and family members that athletes who were used to winning or at least competing effectively at home were now facing regular and dispiriting defeat in the week of the Games against much stronger opponents. Indeed, the range of abilities on show in the football tournament seemed, to observers from the Legacy Research team, to be especially wide and thus perhaps more open to difficulties of this kind.

8.6 These small but very important decisions on divisions can often mean the difference between SO athletes winning a gold medal at one band level, or finishing last – and routinely defeated – in the division immediately above. If there are simply too few athletes or teams in a division they are often elevated into the division above. The fact that it is the importance of *participation* that is stressed at the Games, and that *all* SO athletes receive medals of some description, did not always compensate for the obvious competitive disappointment experienced in this respect by both athletes and their families. Resolving these tensions – between participation and competitive success – is no easy task given the requirements of some sort of selection process which attempts to ‘level up’ individuals or teams before competition begins. At Abbey Park, at the Games *equestrian event*, there was no competition on this first day but some even more complex arrangements were necessary to accommodate all athletes satisfactorily, as our field notes attest:

*The day was given over to matching competitors with appropriate horses. Some teams were unable to afford to bring their own horse and so had to ‘borrow’ one of those that had been loaned to the Games. Horses had been borrowed from all over the UK and from as far away as Ireland. Coaches were looking at riders’ ability to control the horse; safety was an important issue.*<sup>68</sup>

8.7 At the *bowls competition*, at the privately managed indoor bowls club on Slater Street, there were about 150 people present at the event for the first day, these being made up mainly of players, team members and families. This number excluded volunteers of whom there were 27 in total.<sup>69</sup> The volunteers’ roles included being markers on the rink, plus dealing with the media, VIPs, family services and providing stewarding services for the car park. The perceived ethnic make-up of the 150 people involved here was that they were virtually all white British, but in gender terms the group was quite evenly split between men and women. Some of the younger SO volunteers present were of South Asian origin, thus reflecting Leicester’s diversity. There were probably more women than men here in a family/supporter capacity, an unusual but characteristic feature of Special Olympics during the week of sport, according to our observations. Virtually all the athletes here were over 30 years of age and many were over 50, although a small number of much younger competitors were also present.

8.8 The bowls event had an excellent, relaxed atmosphere, a mix of competitive instincts and collective co-operation. This balance was mainly due to the easy mixing of players and spectators, most of whom were family members. There was a lot of ‘encouraging chatter’ during the competition, which was keenly watched by a very supportive crowd, many of whom were family members with clearly a strong ‘emotional’ investment in the events they were watching. At one point in the afternoon, play had to be suspended (during the last set of games) because a player had to be treated after having suffered what appeared to be a minor fit on the rink. There was no panic here and the same thing might have happened in other sporting competition. There were two first aiders and two police officers present, and they immediately moved into action. After a few minutes the athlete concerned began to recover and there was a round of applause when he finally got to his feet.

8.9 At the *football* event later in the week we had another small insight into some of the real difficulties Special Olympics and other bodies face in accessing people with learning disabilities from the South Asians communities of Britain. Our conversation with a Leicester Sikh volunteer, Manjeet, firstly focused on the rather sophisticated understanding he had of the role of volunteers at the Leicester Games: to aid the SO athletes, but not to make assumptions about their supposed limitations:

*I have to say there isn't really much to do now for the volunteers. At the start we are important. But once people know where everything is and they know how things work I think really you want to keep out of their hair, not get in their way too much. They [athletes] need to do things for themselves as much as possible, that's what I think. But I am enjoying it, doing one day on and another day off. I can't stand around too much every day, so I take some time off to rest.*

8.10 More interesting perhaps were Manjeet's perceptions about dealing with learning disability in South Asians families in Britain – of which he had some personal experience:

*There are very few Asians in the [SO] football teams I noticed that, that's true. I think I saw one in the East Midlands, but that's all. That's no surprise to me. I have my niece with me today – she is Down's Syndrome [a learning disabled girl of around 14 years is playing football with Manjeet's 12 year old son]. And these people are really very*

*intelligent, you know: they are the most loving people you can find. But I think my community feels that we know who these people are and what they need, and we will deal with it. It is a family thing.*

*There is also almost a sense of shame about it [having a learning disabled child or family member] in the community – about not wanting to speak too much about it or having people with these problems involved in these sorts of events [SO]. It is hidden away more. It is a shame but that is just the way things are. Communities deal with these matters in different ways and we deal with it very privately.<sup>70</sup>*

8.11 This Asian SO volunteer had specifically brought his niece to the football venue to offer her at least some experience of an event from which she was effectively excluded. This exclusion was essentially because of a combination of cultural assumptions and institutional failures. This is a rather ad hoc single example, but it helps flag up the important challenges still faced by Special Olympics and also by the local authorities in Leicester in working with people with learning disabilities in British South Asian communities. The *kayaking and sailing events* were similarly almost exclusively white in terms of competing athletes and took place at Rutland Water about 40 minutes away from the city. The venues were reported to the Legacy team to be not well sign-posted from the road and were quite difficult to find for some spectators as a result. At the kayaking competition especially there was an unusually strong emergent camaraderie among the volunteers and coaching leaders, who now have own Facebook group. At the sailing event, athletes with learning disabilities teamed up with other sailors.

8.12 The first impression at the *athletics events* at the Saffron Lane stadium was of a much smartened and improved local venue – with a brand new running track – and one freshly painted and impressively decked out in the SOL branding. There had been concerns expressed beforehand (for example, in the *Leicester Mercury*<sup>71</sup>) that the rather shabby and somewhat ‘worn’ appearance of the Saffron Lane arena and its poorly appointed car parking area might make it an inappropriate venue for staging such an event, but despite its shortcomings the old venue rose well to the occasion. The single, covered trackside stand was pretty full, mainly of athletes of all ages. This was an event – as in many of the 21 Special Olympics sports – where the participants were also largely the spectators. As a rough indicator of the balance between

athletes, family members and other spectators at the Games, on one weekday at the athletics track we counted 17 people in the section reserved for local spectators and approximately 90 for the one reserved for families. The other sections were made up members of the athletic squads and we counted around 400 of these individuals in total.<sup>72</sup> There may have been some mixing of family members and athletes here, but this general picture – replicated at other venues we visited – rather confirms our view that although Special Olympics was strongly publicly conveyed by the organisers as an attractive spectator event for local people to attend, actually after the Opening Ceremony has concluded it is essentially a range of sports events aimed at SO athletes and their families and sited at discrete venues dotted around the city. There should be no real surprise at this relative lack of active local support. After all, all the SO sporting events occur between 9-5pm on working days and few events took place in arenas specifically built for sports spectating. Because entry to sporting events was free, there was no pre-event ticket distributions or ticket sales to really ‘bind-in’ local people as spectators, as would happen for most other sporting events.

**Table 8.3: Visitor & Local Views on Publicity for the 2009 Summer Games**

Visitors	Locals
<i>‘I was aware of promotional events in Leicester via publicity at various buildings’</i>	<i>‘Just a shame people don’t know what’s going on; the lack of information is poor. I thought Saffron Lane was closed. I had to find out about it [SO] on internet. There was no information at the Town Hall – nothing on the event’</i>
<i>‘Lots of people didn’t know about SO back home [in Fife]. I wouldn’t know anything about it bar for family connections’</i>	<i>‘To be quite honest, I don’t think it was publicized very well. Only a couple of months ago I knew of publicity’</i>
<i>‘I can’t say I’ve noticed anything in the town centre’</i>	<i>‘I knew it was on; a One-Leicester booklet sent via post’</i>
<i>‘It hasn’t been publicized enough. In Glasgow there were banners everywhere. In Leicester I have seen nothing on SO. I’ve seen One-Leicester signs, but nothing specifically on SO’</i>	<i>‘Coverage on national TV re 2012, but nothing about SO; should be more nationwide’</i>
<i>‘I couldn’t find the bowls [event] the other day. I asked people but they didn’t know where it was. Neither did they know at the bus station’</i>	<i>‘I am just interested in local events, so I found out through Leicester Mercury and Radio’</i>



*'The media coverage has been not too bad e.g. local newspapers and local [TV] news. But generally, the Games are not advertised very well. Leicester people are really friendly; they've had a lot more local knowledge. I liked the bus drivers – friendly as anything'.*

*Leicester'*

*'I was aware of event through badminton club [she was a member]'*

*'[There is] a lack of media coverage both local and national. TV showed Gordon [Brown]'*

*'Local radio stations have given a good representation. I have seen families in the park who may have stumbled across it. SO had the banners up: quite good publicity'*

*'Not much awareness; it's not very visible around town. I weren't aware that the OC was open to the public. I haven't seen much media, only TV'*

*'I didn't know Leicester was hosting until it was confirmed. Most nights it is featured on East Midlands news'*

*'I have seen local leaflets and used website to check times'*

*'I thought it would have been staged at larger venues. No information in the local media re the running order of events. I had to go on internet'*

*'The word 'Olympics' is the key for me. This is an Olympic Games; should be more coverage. Website is very good. Leicester Mercury has good coverage, but there should be more on TV. SO would have been rammed if they'd done it right'*

*'Not publicized enough. There needs to be more media involvement. It needs more spectators, needs more backing'*

*'I found out about SO recently via a leaflet; [it] looked quite professional'*

*'Not much publicity, not even on BBC. I would have expected more people here. It is difficult to get information on the phone and I'm unsure about the tickets; I had colleagues who would have come but [they] didn't know how to.'*

*'At work we encourage people with LD to participate. We received a lot of information on SOL at work'*

*Source: SO Legacy Research, 2009*

8.13 The uncharacteristically poor weather in the early part of the week would also have dissuaded at least some potential local attendees and, as we have said, when some local people did turn up to some SO events they ended up being excluded and disappointed. But some of our on-site interviewees who *did* attend the Games – visitors and especially locals – also commented on what they argued to be the relative lack of publicity material advertising the Games locally and the lack of information made available to potential local spectators (see Table 8.3). Sometimes, of course, local people can simply miss the information and publicity which is carefully aimed at them and some of these respondents may well be overstating their case. But the relative absence of Leicester-based spectators for the Games meant that, in effect, the main local supporters and fans of Special Olympics in Leicester were the enthusiastic local and regional *volunteers* who were present at every SO event.

8.14 On Monday at the Saffron Lane stadium, the day was mostly given over to classification but when competition finally began the fine balance established between personal achievement, participation and competition was soon in evidence, as our field notes reveal:

*All the athletes received a very good reception [from the crowd], and there was much encouragement for them, with athletes finishing last probably receiving more applause than those who had won. Between races the tannoy played music to keep the crowd entertained. There was also an audible commentary on races and this seemed to strike the right tone i.e. it was more about encouragement for all, although it also did maintain the competitive seriousness of the event by identifying the athletes by name, and thus the winners by name.<sup>73</sup>*

8.15 Despite (perhaps partly because of) the increasingly inclement weather (high winds and rain) the powerful bonds that were already emerging between volunteers, SO athletes, officials and spectators were frequently to the fore in the athletics event. These were revealed in a 'the

show must go on' collective determination among the main actors as the heavens opened. For example, at the Saffron Lane venue:

*There were two terrific thunderstorms which caused the athletics to be suspended for about 15 minutes. During the first one, a kind of 'Blitz Spirit' was in evidence. The tannoy began to play records, tongue in cheek, such as Morecambe and Wise's 'Bring Me Sunshine', Eddie Cochrane's 'Summertime Blues', and also 'Walking in the Rain' ... A couple of volunteers then started dancing when the first storm was abating in an attempt to 'entertain the troops'. Next, an athlete began to 'dance' by himself. He was then given an umbrella by a volunteer and [he] proceeded to give a 'Gene Kelly' impression before the umbrella collapsed and crumpled up.<sup>74</sup>*

8.16 By the end of Monday the sports were in full swing in nearly all Leicester venues. The downpours meant that part of the Games Village, the Healthy Athlete area, had to be closed because of flooding. The first medal of the Games, won by Kate Powell at the swimming, was reported by Jim Smallman on BBC Radio Leicester.<sup>75</sup> One of the highlights of Tuesday's competition was the visit of Games Patron Gary Lineker to the *football tournament* at the Goals Centre at Crown Hills Community College in the South-Asian dominated Evington area. Lineker was practically mobbed by athletes and family members alike as he signed hundreds of autographs and posed for photographs and briefly watched the competition. He also accepted a cheque raised for Special Olympics from the Islamic Foundation.<sup>76</sup> Celebrity support is a vital source of oxygen for the publicity required for events such as Special Olympics and Lineker is a high profile sporting figure nationally and especially in Leicester. There was the usual scrum of film crews, photographers and journalists to greet Lineker's arrival at Goals, but jobbing journalists are often reluctant on these occasions to focus on the event in question, preferring to use the contact time to ask general questions about elite sport.

8.17 In a competitive contact team sport such as football, it is also very important to carefully and sensitively manage the players, for example when one team threatens to become very dominant or else when the pressure begins to build on individuals in other ways in team situations. Both the coaches and referees involved at Goals generally adopted a highly 'sympathetic' approach to dealing with the rising frustrations of some young male players, or

with the plight of weaker teams when things did not always go their way, as our field notes recall:

*It is also noticeable that when players do foul or get over-excited and perhaps are close to losing their temper, coaches often judiciously substitute the offender to allow them some time to cool down. Players sometimes get very upset with their own team-mates – who may have a more visibly serious disability – when mistakes are made often by the latter, resulting in goals against. The players involved can be crestfallen or frustrated and they may need immediate ‘lifting’ or ‘cooling out’ by their watching supporters and by officials ...*

*In one match I watched the referee began leaning, in the sunshine, on the side-boards because there was so little for him to do. He then nonchalantly tapped a free-kick to a player in the losing team to try to aid them in scoring – no one complained.<sup>77</sup>*

8.18 The popular *gymnastics* competition at Summer Games 2009 simply had to be very well organized due to the sheer complexity of the event and the restricted space allocated to the gymnasts. Several activities took place simultaneously in one smallish hall. Coaches and organisers were generally in control of events and there were smooth changeovers between them. The crowd was intensely interested and lively, clapping to music as each group of gymnasts marched out of the hall. The logistics were not quite so complicated at the *badminton* competition at Babington Community College, where national affiliation vied strongly with regional representation. But these badminton followers, based in a college to the north end of Leicester just inside the outer ring road in the Beaumont Leys residential area, also felt a little detached from other SO sports in the city, as our field notes attest:

*The badminton competition is both intense and friendly – there is a real sense of ‘bonding’ here between the competitors, athletes, spectators and volunteers partly because there are relatively few central competitors and so those involved as volunteers and officials soon develop friendly and supportive relationships with individual athletes. Volunteers had ‘favourite’ competitors for example.*

*This is a venue which is decked out in the vibrant colours of SOL when one gets up close, but it actually feels quite isolated, being based at this [north] end of the city from the other SO activities. Some spectators complained that without a car it was difficult to move between different SO venues from this base and thus to make connections with other sports in the city. This means they feel rather isolated from the rest of the Games –*

*there are few opportunities (no time or transport) to travel across the city to watch other sports when your own badminton match is over, for example.<sup>78</sup>*

8.19 The Leicester Mercury pointed out that some SO venues especially to the south end of the city – for athletics, table-tennis and tennis, for example – were actually quite close together, but we have little evidence that SO families travelled between venues to watch different sports.<sup>79</sup> At the badminton the temporary spectator seating was sited on just one side of the college venue; there was a balcony but no general seating at the end of the courts because of a lack of space. There were often up to three different matches in progress in the same hall and this arrangement meant that it was actually quite difficult for family members and supporters to maintain effective and close contact with the match and the players they were specifically watching, without seemingly ignoring or even risking disrupting the match in immediate proximity. Another feature of the badminton event – no doubt replicated in other SO venues – was that *national* SO representatives vied directly with regional ones:

*It is also very interesting to have national teams so strongly represented at this venue – Scotland and especially Wales are very involved in the badminton event – in a competition in which most of the competitors come from the British regions. One senses from conversations with the people from Wales and from their very vocal styles of support that the athletes from Wales and their families feel a rather different and special sense of elevated representative pride compared to other SO competitors.<sup>80</sup>*

8.20 Here again, the badminton match officials – generously provided by the EBA – were quite excellent in their understated work with the SO athletes. On occasions, for example, some players were unsure about where exactly to stand on court or who they were serving to in the doubles matches. The officials, quite discretely, were very happy to direct or ‘place’ the players on court and to indicate, when necessary, the direction of serve. In this sense the officials became much less the neutral arbiters of the contest – though they were scrupulously fair – but much more engaged actors, as part of the event. The importance of this kind of involvement and support was only confirmed when it was clear at the badminton medal ceremonies that some athletes needed some guidance to make their way onto the podium to receive their awards.

8.21 At the *netball competition* at Soar Valley Community College there was a spectators' area at the venue that seated approximately 96 people. Most of the crowd was made up of families and players, numbering about 64 in total. There were approximately 10 spectators present who were not directly involved with the athletes. In an area with a large British South Asian local population, the crowd was predominantly white, except for the presence of three local South Asian trainee teachers. The netball event was a highly energized one and it fully involved both volunteers and officials in highly supportive roles with the athletes.

8.22 At the *Motor Activities Training Programme (MATP)*, the athletes have multiple and profound learning disabilities and are unable to take part in other sports. There was lots of encouragement here, much cheering and clapping from the spectators. Some of those watching were, clearly, family members, but others were athletes drawn in from other sports on their own rest days. The watching athletes were especially supportive and, again, there were relatively few identifiably local spectators from an area that is dominated by Leicester's South Asian communities. For the *boccia* competition there were initial fears from some visitors about its Belgrave location – in the very heart of Leicester's large South Asian community. But these concerns were soon overcome, as this delighted visitor from Dundee in Scotland confirms:

*I had some apprehension about the boccia location, but it seems ideal. I had the impression it would be isolated but it was in the heart of the community and the transport was adequate. Using public transport has also proved very reasonable.*

8.23 Our field notes offer just a flavour of the extraordinary atmosphere generated at the MATP event, which is perhaps the most emblematic of all events of the determination of Special Olympics to involve *all* those with learning disabilities – no matter how severe – in some kind of sports-related activity, competitive or not:

*When something called the 'log roll' was announced one MPLD athlete loudly cried out: 'Oh no!' A girl had to be lifted with a hoist from her wheelchair. Lying on her back, she then had to roll over onto her side. These events are not obviously competitive as there are no winners or losers. All those taking part were awarded medals at some time during the Games week. One gold medal went to a competitor because they had not won a*

*medal already and the silver medal went to someone who already had gold. Some events only had one participant.*<sup>81</sup>

8.24 As in other SO competition – but perhaps it was more acceptable here than elsewhere because of the profound levels of disability involved and the relative de-emphasis in MAPT on competition – special arrangements were immediately introduced where necessary to allow athletes to participate:

*One girl was reluctant to perform in public and she kept running off. She was then taken behind a screen to do her task in private and was greeted with massive cheers when she emerged, successful, a few minutes later. Some spectators and also the medal presenters, Col. Martin and Mr. Gaffar, director of the local NHS Trust, all said how ‘moving’ the events were. They praised the carers and remarked on how much ‘patience’ they must have. The day’s events finished with all those present singing and waving their hands and walking if able to or else being pushed in wheelchairs around to the strains of ‘We are the Champions’.*<sup>82</sup>

8.25 One of the characteristics of Special Olympics Summer Games is that it covers a very wide range of events and motivations among those athletes involved. So, unlike at the MATP event where the emphasis was mainly on reaching personal goals and establishing personal achievement, the *power lifting* competition was quite intensely competitive. The Peepul Centre’s film and theatre stage was a superb setting for this event. Some of the volunteers involved here were young men from different ethnic backgrounds from the Glen Parva Young Offenders Centre, which had also loaned the necessary equipment for the Games. There were over a hundred spectators filling about a half to two-thirds of the seating during our visits, and the same officials and ‘three lights’ judging procedures were used here as would be used in national and international elite lifting competitions. The officials were drawn from the relevant national governing body.

8.26 The crowd was both supportive and enthusiastic and the volunteers also received their own awards at the end of the competition and the medals ceremony. It was easy to see that this work and reward on a public stage might be very important in helping to reorient – and even help in the process of re-constructing – the damaged identities (as society sees it) of some

of these vulnerable young men who were working as volunteers. Local community centre manager Roy Cole, a man of African-Caribbean heritage who was involved in managing the power-lifting event, was very passionate about the importance of the involvement of these young male offenders as volunteers for Special Olympics:

*This is a great story about Special Olympics and we should say more about it. But it is really fantastic for the personal development of these young men who have all had various problems in their lives and have turned to violence or crime to try to 'solve' them. I think they can learn a lot about personal discipline and overcoming problems from seeing what people with learning difficulties can achieve in sport. Being on stage like this gives them [young offenders] a real sense of responsibility and we need to look at more ways like this of bringing young black men [from places like Glen Parva] back into the community.<sup>83</sup>*

8.27 The general atmosphere at Special Olympics competitive events – at least as far as our interviewees were concerned – was reported to be overwhelmingly positive. Table 8.4 reports on typical comments from those we talked to.

**Table 8.4: Selected Comments from Volunteers, Visitors and Locals on the 'Atmosphere' of the 2009 Event**

*'Everything is great - as it was in 1989. Everybody so friendly; always a good atmosphere; kids enjoy it' – local [bowls]*

*'Whole scenario superb' – visitor [bowls]*

*'Nice to catch up with old faces, riders and coaches; shattered after SO' – visitor [equestrian]*

*'It's a pleasure to be here. We've been looked after very well' – visitor*

*'Making friends; coaches and competitors are very supportive' – visitor*

*'Special Olympics is something new. I'm trying to get grand-daughter interested in sport and athletics generally' – local [athletics]*

*'Atmosphere is very positive; very friendly' – local [volunteer]*

*'When you come [to SO] you really appreciate how friendly it is. It is not like the aggression at other events, there is more support from family and friends. Shame there isn't more [local] support; I assumed more of the [Leicester] public would be here' – local [volunteer at Boccia]*

*'There is a great atmosphere. Volunteers and staff are very friendly from my first time at an event like*



*this' – visitor [netball]*

*'Really enjoying it; good organization' – visitor*

*'Enjoyed the variety of sports and that it was open to public' – local*

*'Very good – a par with Glasgow and Dublin' – visitor [badminton]*

*'Special Olympics generally, I think it's brilliant. Wouldn't it be a better place for all sport? Long may it continue' – visitor*

*'The atmosphere at events is fantastic' – local*

*'It has been enjoyable; everybody's worked hard to make this happen and everyone's been so friendly' – visitor*

*'It's been a very good experience – with some little hiccups. We went to Glasgow in 2005 and little things here could have been different. But we had an excellent time in 05, and here' – visitor*

*'It's amazing, far better than we'd anticipated and really enjoyable Why, because of the atmosphere and the friendliness. The camaraderie amongst teams; its heart-warming' – visitor [swimming]*

*'Things have been good here – more local support would have been nice but we have been well looked after' – visitor [football]*

*'Experience has been ok, better than what I expected. I didn't know about the system. Not as good as Glasgow though, which was far better' – visitor [swimming]*

*'Games' experience has been good. It's been well organized; it's been fun. The atmosphere in the judo has been good' – visitor [judo]*

*'The experience has been brilliant; I just like sport and the people with me like judo' – visitor [judo]*

*'The Games have been good. People help you, especially the volunteers who have been brilliant' – visitor [judo]*

*'Apart from transport everything's been champion' – visitor [judo]*

*'At the end of the day it's an Olympic event. I want to see the build-up all the way through. We could have done with some big people here from the judo world' – local [judo]*

*'I came with the kids. We went to the equestrian event but it was a bit wet. Have tried to get to other events because I'm interested in the sports side of it' – local [judo]*

*'People have enjoyed it and some have become engaged in sport. SO is also good as a social event' – local [equestrian]*

*'Experience has been really good. It is interesting to see the standards' – local [equestrian]*

*'Special Olympics join people together. There's more involvement here with people with learning disabilities. In general there isn't much awareness of PWLD [people with learning disabilities], so it is good to have Special Olympics in Leicester' – local [cycling]*

**Source: Special Olympics Legacy Research 2009**

8.28 In closing, finally, on the sporting events at Special Olympics in 2009, it is perhaps important to reiterate that, added to the normal difficulties of managing an event on this scale in 21 different venues on a drastically reduced budget, the British July weather badly let the Leicester organizers down, especially at the start and middle of the Games Week. The weather is often the curse of outdoor summer sport in England, of course, but most sports bodies have to manage problems in *one* sport only. The situation at Special Olympics was rather different. But throughout this discouragement, the Games adapted, innovated and struggled through remarkably well, always making the most of what was on offer, whilst inevitably paying the price of limiting any potential interest from local spectators. What were described as 'magical' scenes of athletes, volunteers, police officers and others all dancing in the rain at the Games Village during a huge downpour on Wednesday evening rather typified the defiant spirit in the face of the elements.<sup>84</sup> The scenes we recorded at the Leicestershire County Cricket ground at Grace Road on Monday 27 July are also probably typical of what was going on around the city on that inhospitable day:

*Due to bad weather conditions the first day of the Kwik cricket competition was moved inside to the indoor cricket school. Access to the ground was difficult due to all the main match day entrances being closed. The only way to enter the ground was via the main players' entrance at the back of the ground. The club had, however, made a special effort to re-brand the ground with Leicester Special Olympics advertising boards and signs. The club had also arranged for an ECB 'batting cage' road-show to be based on the outfield and for a catering truck to provide hot food and drinks. Unfortunately, spectators were very limited. Attendance was divided between athletes, parents and volunteers. I was only aware of one or two spectators with no links to the players.<sup>85</sup>*

8.29 The week concluded with a closing party or ceremony held in intermittently drizzly weather on the evening of Friday 31 July at Abbey Park, at which, reportedly, more than 3,500 people were present, mainly athletes.<sup>86</sup> The closing party was sponsored by the charity *Self Unlimited* who stepped in to save this final event after it was initially ruled out due to the budget cuts. According to the sponsors:

*Self Unlimited was extremely proud to support the Closing Ceremony for the Games, with funding achieved from the Forbes Charitable Foundation. This took the form of a huge party on Friday 31 July in Abbey Park, Leicester, which gave all of the athletes the opportunity to celebrate their personal achievements with family, supporters and coaches and to say their fond farewells until the next Games.*<sup>87</sup>

8.30 Speaking to the partygoers at the closing of the Games, SOL Chairman Ted Cassidy told the assembled crowd:

*This week has surpassed every expectation I had for the games. The athletes, their families, the volunteers, the games team and the people of Leicester have made this a world class event. I hope that everyone who has attended the games has enjoyed themselves. The athletes truly are an inspiration to us all.*<sup>88</sup>

8.31 In the aftermath of the 2009 Summer Games many of those directly involved as spectators, medal presenters, officials and volunteers, perhaps predictably, found it very difficult to talk about the Special Olympics experience *without* resorting to the sort of language and discourses which are often read by those who work in this area as patronizing or even demeaning to the athletes and families involved. Terms such as ‘moving’, ‘humbling’ and, indeed, ‘inspiring’ are commonplace here and they can inadvertently send out the wrong message about Special Olympics and those who participate as athletes in the Summer Games. They can also sometimes underplay the incredible difficulties involved in staging events such as Special Olympics and can even lead to the under-reporting of what can go wrong in staging a Games of this complexity and scale. But the use of such terms is also perhaps understandable in this context. This is especially the case given the relative lack of experience and knowledge that most people have of those who live daily with the rewards and challenges of learning disabilities. It is, indeed, a very striking experience to see sometimes severely disabled athletes pushing themselves to their personal limits and being – albeit briefly – centre stage for once;

being publicly celebrated for their sporting performance and competitive instincts. It is also striking to see the extraordinary pleasure and pride expressed by both athletes and their families during Games Week and the generally highly supportive collective context in which all SO athletes perform. There was very little of the intense tribalism or excessive partisanship at Special Olympics that is common in top level sport today and which often obstructs the celebration of sport for its own sake. Indeed, there was a profound sense here of a very important *shared* experience for athletes, families and coaches – and indeed for volunteers and officials – which meant that the joy of victory in Leicester was always balanced by a proper reverence for the contribution of all competitors.

8.32 For all the justifiable concerns about the existence of a separated sport for the learning disabled in an age in which greater integration of people with disabilities is an important goal, it is nevertheless difficult to conceive of any fully integrated sporting competition which would not be elitist and which would not exclude some of those who routinely compete in Special Olympics. Again, the public acknowledgment and celebration of a *sporting* performance is central here and in important ways. However, we are not suggesting that Special Olympics itself should exclude potential athletes. Nevertheless, because of its unusual origins and ad hoc spread, especially in large urban locations, structural weaknesses means that Special Olympics fails to reach many people with learning disabilities, not least people from minority ethnic backgrounds. But Special Olympics is also clearly significant for those who *are* involved and we will hear later from athletes, families and also from volunteers about the importance of Special Olympics in their own lives.

8.33 It was also very easy during Games week to identify the specific *spirit* of competition in Special Olympics, including the important values of fairness and respect for opponents in sport, values which are too often swamped by other concerns in top level sporting events today. One example comes from a SO football referee, the 15-year-old Will Higham, a young man who was at very early stage in his refereeing career but who noticed a qualitative difference in his work with Special Olympic athletes.

*It is very competitive today, much more than yesterday. There is some hard tackling alright and all the teams want to win, but the atmosphere is great. This is my first time refereeing adult players – I have been reffing for about a year – and it's very different from dealing with the sort of juniors I am used to. Here you don't really get any of the abuse and bad feeling you get from some of the young players in my usual football. You definitely get more respect from the players here, less criticising; the attitude on the pitch is really good. And the people watching say positive things: it's not what I'm used to. The standard is pretty good too. You might be surprised by the quality; there are some very good players in this competition.<sup>89</sup>*

8.34 Among these very positive accounts it is also important of course to recognize the sheer raw competitive instincts and the very human flaws of those involved as participants in the week of the Summer Games. Those involved in Special Olympics are sportsmen and women like many others, after all, and there should be no surprise that such competitors have the virtues but also, sometimes, some of the vices or weaknesses, too, of those involved in competitive sport. We have tried to provide just a flavour of the experience of Games Week in this vein, mainly drawing on our field notes and from our on-site interview material. But we have also been concerned here to collect some general information from visitors and locals about their experiences and comments in the 'white heat' of the week of the Games. Table 8.5 collects together some selected general comments from locals, but mainly visitors, on the Leicester experience in 2009. The main negative comments here focused on transport issues and entertainments for athletes, coaches and family members. Sarah Humphrey from Brighton, at the power-lifting, summed up the point about problems with transport from many similarly frustrated visitors and spectators. She also suggested that travel difficulties were perhaps one reason why local people had not typically come to Special Olympics events.

*Bus service! If I want to watch others should I have to get up at 7.15 am, etc, and stay all day? We needed a shuttle bus at more frequent and regular intervals. We were bored because of the transport problems – and it was £7 for all of us to even get on a bus (five people) ... I don't think people from here [Leicester] can get involved because there are no [special] buses from town for them.*

8.35 But there were plenty of ‘positives’ to counterbalance these criticisms. One small, but telling, example comes from the words of Doreen Power (from the Northern Region), reported at the football event, before we turn to more general comments:

*The organisation here has been really good. I’ll give you one example. One night we got back really late from somewhere – it may have been on the Sunday night – and we said we are really worried about the kit, about getting the kit washed for the next morning. We were going out, you see. And one of the organisers came round and she asked was everything all right and we said we were worried about the kit. So she said ‘Just leave it.’ And the next morning the kit was there, all cleaned and laid out on the beds. They have really looked after us here. Our volunteer – a young girl, I think she is looking after two teams – she has made herself well known to everybody. No, everything has been very good – so it’s a ‘thumbs up’ to Leicester so far.<sup>90</sup>*

**Table 8.5: General Comments from Visitors & Locals on the Organisation of the Special Olympics in Leicester, 2009**

Generally Positive	Generally Negative
<i>Accommodation – very good.</i>	<i>Not much to do during the day when not competing. More events needed during the day for families</i>
<i>Facilities – more organized, much closer. More central to accommodation.</i>	<i>Facilities not as good as Glasgow.</i>
<i>Facilities – pretty good. Leicester has moved on since 1989.</i>	<i>Transport could be improved; we finished at 12 but had to wait until 5pm [to leave].</i>
<i>Athletics – ease of access fine. Good to see Saffron Lane used</i>	<i>Experience – very good apart from organization of transport; had own car and could ferry athletes to and from accommodation.</i>
<i>Facilities – fantastic; tend to avoid Northampton.</i>	<i>Merchandise either unavailable or short at venues.</i>
<i>Facilities for LD better in Leicester, especially for leisure.</i>	<i>Facilities – limited number, but well laid out.</i>
<i>Facilities – very well thought out. Lots of good information sent out beforehand, e.g. maps.</i>	<i>Given information on buses, but [it was] difficult to understand</i>
<i>Tourist information very helpful in walking to venues.</i>	<i>Hoped for entertainment at night – only TV and pool room in one common room. More entertainment for athletes required.</i>
<i>Athletes are well looked after; we’ve wanted for nothing.</i>	<i>Boccia – better signage required both in and outside the venue. Nothing in pictorial format. V. poor &amp; disappointing e.g. for women and ladies’ toilets.</i>
<i>Badminton – we found venue easy to find; very well sign posted.</i>	<i>Tickets for OC didn’t come. Had to get them at the information tent; sent a pack to everyone rather</i>
<i>Games village – okay; Passes arrived quite late.</i>	
<i>Judo – facilities – OK. But every leisure centre looks the same.</i>	
<i>Accommodation at Filbert Village – ‘lovely’. Good</i>	

*food & well organised at Walkers Stadium.  
Even on Wednesday [heavy rain] – we kept on competing. Medal ceremony in the athletes' tent – organization adapted very well to the rain.  
Ran out of stock of hoodies – could have sold more merchandise but very reasonably priced. In Glasgow prices were exorbitant.  
Football – well run.  
Athletics – transport – been good.  
Surprised at variety of sports.  
Enjoyed the medal ceremonies. Lovely experience for the children.  
There are so many venues; thought it would be only in one or two. Budget seems to have been well spent.*

*than for a family – a waste of resources.  
Games Village – closed too early for athletes who'd competed all day.  
Didn't go to other events as there was no shuttle service.  
Entertainment could have been managed better to take into account PWLD. It was of a low grade.  
Games Village – disappointed re: opening times; the disco closed at 9pm.*

**Source: SO Legacy Research, 2009**

8.36 If there were criticisms, as well as praise, for the organisation of Special Olympics in Leicester, how had the Games affected local and visitor perceptions of the city? We will return to this important legacy theme later, but in terms of our interviews with people who attended Special Olympics in 2009 a number of things stand out. Firstly, for visitors, it was the perceived *friendliness* of people in the city – surely a positive impact for Leicester – that seemed so marked in their observations. For the locals we interviewed there was a distinct sense that Special Olympics had simply confirmed, for them, mainly positive aspects of the city's existing identity – things they already knew about Leicester – but also that hosting Special Olympics would probably raise the profile of the city in the face of a threatening economic climate. Typical here were comments such as:

*I supported Leicester hosting the Games. I thought it was Leicester's chance to be broadly inclusive. I thought it was a very positive step for Leicester to make.*

*Special Olympics gives Leicester a bit of a profile. It puts Leicester on the map. I'm not put off by the negative publicity [about Games funding].*

As we shall see in this report, the general support of the Leicester public was very strong for the Games – even though, paradoxically, so few people from the city actually *attended* Special Olympics sport during Games Week.

**Table 8.6: General perceptions of Leicester and Special Olympics**

Visitors	Locals
<i>'In the town centre Leicester doesn't seem to have taken an interest; only a few big banners'</i>	<i>'Leicester is the best city to hold it. Regarding the financial problems, it shouldn't come down to money'</i>
<i>'People very pleasant, very friendly'</i>	<i>'Why not hold it here next year?'</i>
<i>'Local people helped with the directions'</i>	<i>'It's gone really well [for Leicester]. I found out about SO Games on the local news and at the Opening ceremony. It's been very well organized '</i>
<i>'The Council seems very dedicated'</i>	<i>'In the credit crunch it's a boost to the local economy. It inspires people from different age group to take part in sport'</i>
<i>'I was disappointed in the number of public attending [the Games]'</i>	<i>'I would always have been in favour of Leicester hosting Special Olympics. I'm quite happy with them in Leicester'</i>
<i>'I'm going to shopping centre [Highcross] later. Leicester people are very friendly'</i>	<i>'It is good to have this type of event in Leicester. It raises the profile of the city above Nottingham'</i>
<i>'The police were waving to us – very friendly'</i>	<i>'People of Leicester are very proud of their Special Olympics tradition'</i>
<i>'We've been made very welcome in Leicester; people are very courteous'</i>	<i>'I went to the Opening Ceremony and I, wanted to support the events; I'm proud to get it [the Games] back to Leicester'</i>
<i>'It's a 'nice city.' People in Leicester are very friendly, especially volunteers'</i>	<i>'Because it was being held in Leicester I wanted to get involved'</i>
<i>'Leicester people are very friendly. People in Beaumont Leys have stopped us and asked us what we are doing'</i>	<i>'Special Olympics highlights the venues being used. It raises Leicester's profile'</i>
<i>'It's an excellent city. The bus drivers are very courteous'</i>	<i>'I'm not concerned about cost of games – I'm too young [too worry]!'</i>
<i>'We came up in April to suss out hotels, but the Leicester tourist board had no idea about Special Olympics being on, initially'</i>	
<i>'Scottish £20 notes not accepted!'</i>	



*'Leicester is ideal; we've got lots of venues  
I supported the Games as it gets [more] children  
into sport'*

**Source: SO Legacy Research 2009**

## 9. The Organisers' Experience

9.1 Having spent some time discussing the experiences of athletes, families and local spectators during Games Week we now want to spend a little time examining the experience of some of the Games' key *organisers*. We start here with the Leicester Functional Heads, managers who each had responsibility for a key aspect of delivering Games Week. The research team devised an 'open' questionnaire to try to capture aspects of the Games experience for the 'Functional Heads', i.e. those people with the direct responsibility of co-ordinating specific aspects of the Games week. We received detailed replies from six of those involved at this level of the Games management: Simon Brown (Opening Ceremony Director); Marie Chaideftou (Visitor Information Manager); Mike Ferguson (Medical Director); Julian Heubeck (Transport Director); Jim McCallum (Volunteers Director); and Maggie Shutt (Event Control Manager). The main purpose of this detailed survey was to get a sense of the actual requirements and difficulties involved in delivering specific services during the Games Week and how this might be improved for the future. The wider purpose was to identify 'good practice' in order better to understand the problems of 'capacity building' and to contribute to an improved Games legacy in terms of the actual delivery of key services that are likely to come under considerable pressure during Games Week. In trying to do all these things, the research team asked a range of questions concerning:

1. *The pre-Games period: prior experience, training, support, resources, and the organization of those involved;*
2. *The experience of the Games Week itself, including: anticipated and actual issues; the resolving of problems on the spot; perceived levels of personal performance;*

3. *Post Games reflections: lessons learnt; future changes suggested; advice and possible benefits to the city and to the individual concerned.*

9.2 The responsibilities covered in these accounts are very different and it would be of little value to simply go through each response individually for positives and negatives. Instead we have analysed these qualitative responses *thematically* in order to see if there were common problems and reactions across the spectrum of responsibilities. These have been grouped under the following six headings: *i) Budget; ii) Staffing; iii) Organization and communication; iv) Experience and training; v) Operational issues; vi) Benefits*. Inevitably, this is a somewhat arbitrary thematic division of the rich material provided, and in reality there was a good deal of overlap between these categories. Let us look briefly at each of these issues in turn.

#### *i) Budget*

9.3 There was almost unanimous agreement among respondents that the whole budgetary process for the Games had been problematic in terms of delivery of their services for Special Olympics. Only the Medical Director did not raise any budgetary issues. In all other cases the budget and the timing of its resolution was a major cause of concern. This issue was put most powerfully by Simon Brown in relation to the requirements of the Opening Ceremony. In response to the question: 'What was missing in terms of resources?' He simply replied:

*MONEY!!! Normally with an event of this size I work to an agreed budget right from the start, which sets the level of the event. However, expectations were raised without a set budget; the budget was agreed far too late and was far too low to achieve the expectations. This placed incredible pressure on organizing the event within budget, such as relying on 'in kind' entertainment, not being able to secure BIG name artists which would have guaranteed ticket sales for the public, having to struggle to negotiate deals with every contractor.*

9.4 Maggie Shutt also felt her role as Event Control Manager was similarly constrained by a, 'Lack of money available to use on equipment and adaptation of venues ... and budget restrictions with the provision of volunteers.' Similarly the transport controller, Julian Heubeck,

complained that: ‘Finance – or lack of it – undoubtedly caused difficulties in recruiting and managing volunteers.’ The Volunteers Director, Jim McCallum strongly echoed these concerns, pointing out that both Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL) and even some volunteers had ended up with financial concerns as a result of the Games’ wider difficulties in this respect. Those involved in the actual operation of the Games were not directly concerned with the raising of money in advance. Nevertheless, there were complaints that the policy of centralising all fundraising and focusing on a few large sponsors may have lost the Games potential income which might have been more readily available from other sources. Whilst not complaining about shortages in her own area of visitor information, Maria Chaideftou felt – like many – that some of the contractual arrangements around sponsorship-raising for the Games might have been handled differently:

*More care should have been taken when choosing an agency to secure potential sponsors and when signing contracts with terms and conditions that can prove really costly for very little benefit.*

Having said all this, however, it was also the case that the individuals and staff concerned felt that they had managed to cope within the inevitably tighter budgets, and that they were still able to deliver a generally good service. This, however, was done at a personal cost in terms of stress and workload to many of those involved. This aspect of the experience of the Games Week is examined in the following section.

## *ii) Staffing*

9.5 The restrictions on the Games budget meant that in certain key areas there was a serious and unavoidable shortage of staff. The most pressing problem here was in the burden placed on the central administration (see Section 4). Simon Brown was clearly aware of this when he observed that it was sometimes difficult to get information from the Games Office, ‘as the Administrative Director was under far too much pressure and needed one or two assistants’ – a view which strongly reinforced the views of the administrative team itself. In order to save money – and indeed to save the Games – the City Council made its staff available to do work on the Games whilst in some cases still retaining their primary responsibilities. As Maggie Shutt

remarked, 'I had to undertake this role alongside my priority role of Festival and Events Manager,' adding that 'tasks within my role were extended during the process.' She, too, thought the Games 'administrative team needed to be more adequately staffed and supported' and that provisional arrangements for members of the SOL Board to relieve her of event control duties did not materialize. In the event, Shutt had to appoint a health and safety officer to take over as control room manager to provide relief from the 6am to 9pm working hours during the Games week.

9.6 These sorts of difficulties were clearly widely felt. Julian Heubeck, for example, added that: 'There were insufficient resources – in terms of staff – this places undue pressure on individuals ... and undue reliance on volunteers.' This general lack of resources also clearly impacted directly on some of the professional satisfaction and pleasure that ought to be derived from being involved in an event of this type. Staffing on the transport side, for example, was reported to have been, 'an extremely demanding exercise and there was no opportunity to enjoy the actual event'.

### *iii) Organisation and communication*

9.7 Most of the Functional Heads surveyed felt that the Games' *organisational structure* based on the meetings of the Games Organising Committee (GOC) did not always work fully to their satisfaction. The Transport Manager thought 'the GOC meetings were of little use in preparing for the week,' adding that there was 'no structured communication chain.' The Volunteers Director echoed these sentiments, claiming that 'it would have been better to have had an independent chair' and 'there should have been task and finish groups to do "big stuff" between meetings.' Simon Brown thought that the GOC meetings themselves were, 'Far too long, only key issues relevant to all members should have been raised and kept very brief.' Some concerns were also raised in this context about the lack of previous experience of planning and managing similar large events at senior level, and as a consequence one respondent claimed, on occasions, to have led the meetings 'using my own knowledge and sourcing advice from other colleagues and agencies.' To be fair, it was likely that no-one in the

Leicester team had direct experience of managing an event of quite this scale or complexity. All were learning quickly under highly stressful conditions.

9.8 This, in essence, is a story of the delivery of a large event under the considerable additional constraints of intense time and financial pressures. These well-intentioned and hard working individuals – experienced and competent in their own areas – were required to quickly learn on the job and to also work in a rather different way because of the above, as well as facing the additional challenges posed by working to satisfy the requirements of the learning disabled community and their families. In this context, good communication is clearly a priority. How could different managers with complex responsibilities communicate with each other effectively? One manager felt that, ‘Communication could have been clearer at times during GOC meetings and that task group meetings seemed to achieve more.’ However, the Medical Director did find the GOC, ‘Very useful as I was able to focus on the many different aspects of the Games.’ Overall, the provision of medical services seems to have been the most self-contained, and probably the least problematic, of the different management functions under consideration here. The Volunteers Director was more blunt in his assessment, which included a revealing moment of self-evaluation: ‘I came to understand that there was a whole profession called event management ... the Volunteering Director should have been recruited from that profession.’ Most managers surveyed agreed that the real value of the GOC was that these busy individuals were at least brought together on a regular basis. Proper contact could be made therefore and problems aired and sometimes resolved. At times, however, it seems as if the GOC was a way of getting hold of people for a short time rather than a central committee for planning the Games. At the core of the problem was that the 2009 Games was really like no other event that most of those responsible had ever been involved in before.

9.9 In this context, it would clearly have been invaluable for SOGB to advise more closely than it was able to and to bring more directly to the group the benefits of its experience of running previous National Summer Games. There was also little or no direct contact in the immediate build-up to the Games between those who had carried out these demanding functions at

previous Special Olympic Summer Games and those whose job it now was to run the Games week in Leicester 2009. The premise here was probably that different cities are perceived to have entirely different logistical problems. Despite these difficulties, during the week itself the key organizational structures seemed to operate reasonably satisfactorily, although the amount of information supplied on this topic was surprisingly limited. There was a morning meeting each day arranged by the Event Control Manager with the Games Executive Director and the Chair of the SOL09 Board. The Volunteers Director felt 'the nightly Delegation Leaders Meeting worked well to address issues.'

#### *iv) Experience and training*

9.10 There was a significant range of experience within the group surveyed: some were working in areas with which they were already very familiar but some were probably moving out of their comfort zone. However, even those who were doing jobs where they already had expert knowledge and extensive training had not worked much before with people with learning disabilities. Simon Brown had put on events involving up to 18,000 people but he had no previous experience of SOGB and initially he found it difficult to get information on previous Games from SOGB. Similarly, the Visitor Information Manager remarked: 'I had six years experience running projects in skills ... and tourism but no experience in learning disabilities.' The Event Control Manager had extensive experience in event management on a large scale. Although she had no specific experience of a learning disabled event, she had considered those with disabilities when planning previous festivals and events. She also found it useful that there was a Disabled Persons Access Officer in the risk advisory group. The Transport Manager, however, had no previous experience of dealing with a project on this scale and he felt he needed greater warning of the demands that would be placed on him and his staff. He reflected that: 'What was not apparent at the start of the planning process was the massive scale of the task involved.'

9.11 It was very evident from these responses that the sheer complexity and special requirements of a major event involving very large numbers of people with learning disabilities

was not properly or fully explained to the Functional Heads at the outset. Even the Medical Director, who had the fewest problems overall, remarked that, 'There was no preparation, no specific training.' The Event Control Manager found that the provision of information within SOL was restricted, 'because of the extreme demands being made on the time of the small number of individuals involved' (see 9.5 'Staffing'). When she 'contacted SOGB representatives ... they provided me with adequate support and advice and were helpful as they could refer to resolutions and aspects of previous Games.' But this kind of support seemed to be offered mainly on an 'as required' or even an ad hoc basis. In retrospect, it is clear that access to the accumulated fund of specialist knowledge about dealing with people with learning disabilities, which resides at SOGB and elsewhere, needed to be made rather more readily available to all concerned.

#### *v) Operational issues*

9.12 'The main problems during the [Games] Week were caused by events finishing at different times than stated.' This view of the Event Control Manager was echoed by most of those involved at this managerial level and it reflects the uncertain claims of Special Olympics to be considered to be a major sporting event in the conventional sense. Changes in timing were partly connected to late changes in the anticipated numbers of competing athletes, but it also affected some potential spectators who occasionally turned up to watch sports that had already concluded. This problem of timing was most obvious, as we have already seen, in relation to the Games Opening Ceremony but it also impacted on competition and thus on the perceptions of potential spectators and sponsors. Transport was particularly badly affected by, 'Late changes to the sporting programmes ... and the lack of prior consultation before changes.' In the case of the medical teams, the main problem of Games Week was simply the sheer number of venues involved – 21 for 21 sports – and the fact they were widely dispersed around the city. The serious logistical problems in accommodating athletes and spectators at the swimming venue, as well as those involved in co-ordinating the running of events alongside the presenting of medals, invariably meant the swimming events ran late which, in-turn, 'affected transport and catering at the accommodation'.

9.13 However, it would be misleading to suggest the event was plagued with problems and that arrangements did not work as planned. On the contrary, despite the budget problems and the lack of training and preparation and the difficulties of running so many events at the same time in so many individual venues, the overall impression was that the key services actually worked well during Games Week. The Visitor Information Manager, for example, reported that: 'My team and I performed as expected, and our goals for the week were achieved.' The Transport Manager concluded, perhaps a little less certainly, that 'I survived the week and nothing went wrong. We were able to respond and deal with problems as they arose.' He also learned quickly: 'It became slightly easier as the week went on because we could anticipate problems.' The Volunteers Director thought that, 'It was OK. We worked long hours and made our own luck by being out and about a lot.' Reviewing her own performance, the Event Control Manager concurred with this view: 'I feel I delivered what was required both in the planning process and during the week.' Although the volunteering programme was undoubtedly one of the most successful aspects of the event, it did pose challenging problems to the professionals directing operations at times. For example, the Transport Manager noted that shortage of resources,

*placed an undue reliance on volunteers, which weakened the planning process, because of the lack of certainty regarding the availability of sufficient volunteers in all roles and their late allocation of roles. This meant they could not be briefed too much in advance [and] could not meet colleagues or understand and explore their roles.*

9.14 Volunteers were crucial to the Opening Ceremony, but its director concluded that the event 'had made him cautious in the use of volunteers and more aware of issues involved in their inclusion.' The relations between several of the functional areas and those in charge of volunteers did not work all that well in some cases. The Visitor Information Manager had particular problems, claiming not only that her operations had been hampered by poor communication with VAL but that 'the service other partners to this project have received from VAL could also have been delivered more efficiently and effectively, and issues could have been communicated and resolved in a more timely manner.' The Volunteers Director admitted he did



‘not really’ have experience of ‘handling a project on this scale’ which involved ‘the confluence of sport and tourism.’ In addition, Special Olympics 2009 occurred at a rather difficult moment for VAL: ‘The event coincided with a spurt of growth following the takeover of the functions of other charities and a staff re-organisation, which involved me having to re-apply for my own job and help others to do the same.’ He admitted that ‘it [the Games] was unknown territory and we were far from confident that we had done enough’, adding ‘we kept our nerve and got lucky in the week.’

9.15 It is perhaps worth stressing here the disparity that existed between the views of those involved in the complex task of managing volunteers and the almost universal perception on the part of the athletes, families and the public that the volunteer programme was one of the most successful features of the Games. Much of this, of course, must go down to the personal qualities and commitment of the volunteers themselves. However, beneath the apparent success of the volunteer programme – which was very widely commented upon – there were important organisational strains in getting together so many volunteers for so many different duties. Any city contemplating holding the Games will have to come to terms with the hidden difficulties in using what might appear to be a ‘free’ resource of motivated and skilled help.

*vi) The rewards of being involved*

9.16 For all the reservations expressed about the running of the Games, the Functional Heads were very clear that the Games themselves were a great success. ‘I would not change anything in relation to how the week went’ was the view of the Visitor Information Manager. The Event Control Manager concluded: ‘We all pulled together, consulting each other for advice and experience and supporting each other.’ The Transport Manager broadly agreed that, ‘partnership working was the key to the success of the Games.’ Here he was thinking not only of the other Functional Heads but also in particular of ‘the police force, the bus operators, the highways department, the fire and ambulance services.’ The sheer complexity of keeping so many different public services informed and available, as required, is no mean feat. For all the strain and the obvious hard work involved, most of the Functional Heads felt that they had

benefited from the Games experience in both personal and professional terms. 'I enjoyed myself immensely in being involved with the Games,' was the verdict of the Medical Director. As was the case with the other managers, the sheer pleasure this event gave to the athletes was very important to the organising team. 'The actual event is fantastic for the athletes involved and is a great thing for the city of Leicester to have been associated with' was one comment that could stand for the many. Despite the strains and difficulties outlined above, the value of the event for raising awareness of those with learning disabilities was shared by all concerned. There was a clear consensus here that holding the 2009 Games in the city had raised the general awareness in Leicester – or at the least worked on existing local ignorance – about the learning disabled.

9.17 Given that several of the Functional Heads had never worked on a large scale event of this kind before, it was a steep learning experience for them and most felt it had contributed significantly to their professional development. 'I learned a great deal about adapting an event to suit the needs of the learning disabled,' as the Event Control Manager remarked, adding that, 'I also learned about holding a long-running event.' Simon Brown felt it was 'professionally, a fantastic experience to organize such a large scale event and to become more aware of disability issues, which will help in the organizing of future events.' In addition, he felt he had developed new skills and made 'some great links to various arts organizations, especially disability arts companies'. Finally, the Visitor Information Manager, who had a background in tourism, noted the positive effect of holding the Games on visitor numbers for Leicester but – not unreasonably – felt that the legacy research project was not sufficiently focused on this aspect of the event and that it did not have the specialist experience required to assess fully the economic impact of visitors to the city during Games week.

## 10. The Heads of Delegation Experience

10. 1 In contrast to Leicester's Functional Heads, in some ways the people with *most* experience of Special Olympics GB National Games are likely to be the regional Heads of Delegations (HOD). These dedicated individuals are mainly volunteers who have usually been involved with SOGB at regional level for some time. They often have experience of Summer Games in different UK (and foreign) cities, have worked with a number of different administrations in other host cities, understand how the competition works, know their athletes well, have worked with many volunteers and have supported and involved many families in disability sport. They are also often the best placed representatives to be able to comment on the general condition of their regional teams and thus the *collective* experience of the Games. Because of their importance and likely extensive experience of Special Olympics, a questionnaire-based survey – aimed at all 19 Heads of Delegation who were involved in the Leicester Games – was conducted. We received 12 detailed replies, including two from Forth Valley where the head coach of swimming also completed the questionnaire to provide additional information from that region. Only three replies came from people attending their first Summer Games. These data have been included in the analysis of the results which follows.

10.2 Apart from the Scottish respondents, the Heads of Delegation had all attended the National Games at least once before. Six of them, representing half of our small sample, had attended four or more Games, and five had been to Summer Games six or more times before Leicester. This indicates the longevity of some Special Olympics volunteers in the regions and it is something of a tribute to their dedication and commitment to sport and to people with learning disabilities. However, it may also mask a longer term problem of an aging group of volunteer coaches, organisers and supporters with experience at a senior level in SOGB. The National Games take place at four-year intervals. Thus, those who have attended six Games have been involved in Special Olympics for at least 20 years. The possible emergent problem of an aging leadership of SO volunteers was discussed by delegates at the Leicester Pre-Games Conference

in April 2009. The organisation hopes to attract more younger people and to get them involved as many of the current volunteers are reported to be getting older and some may soon wish to retire. As one of the Heads of Delegation in our survey reported:

*The average age of our committee only gets older and it is getting harder to find younger volunteers. In general, the hoops that volunteers have to go through – CRBs, etc – and the new system coming into place, only helps to put people off becoming volunteers.*

10.3 One advantage of surveying senior volunteers who have been involved in several previous National Summer Games is that they have other relevant experiences with which to compare Leicester. The Heads of Delegation were asked about the general administration of the 2009 Summer Games before they arrived in Leicester. Despite the obvious strains in Leicester which we have reported on, nine out of 12 respondents (75%) rated the Leicester administration as ‘highly efficient’ or ‘efficient’. Four of the respondents went on to say in response to a question about improving services that ‘nothing’ could have been improved. Typical comments here included: ‘No real issues: we found staff helpful and accommodating. If you asked a question you got a reply.’<sup>91</sup> One of the Scottish regional HODs wrote at some length – and with high praise:

*We have nothing but praise for the Games staff who we had to deal with on issues of a general nature and aspects of the Games organisation that concerned specific sports. Responses to questions [were] always positive and in almost every instance [they were] received by return. Fife greatly appreciates the complexity of an event of this nature and we have nothing but praise for the manner in which pre-Games information was distributed and dealt with by Games staff. Thereafter we circulated the information to our management team and head coaches. The process worked well.*<sup>92</sup>

10.4 Five respondents, however, did make suggestions for improvements to pre-Games arrangements. Two said, perhaps predictably, that there should have been more administration staff involved in managing the pre-Games situation. Also, and perhaps related to the call for more staff, were the comments from one respondent that information ‘Should have been sent out more quickly so there was less of a rush getting forms filled in at the last minute’ and ‘more information was needed for families before the Games’. One respondent referred to

'lost paperwork' which they also linked to staffing issues. Another view was that there was too 'much paperwork' from Leicester. For example, one delegation reported that it was sent information about netball and basketball even though they did not have teams for those sports.<sup>93</sup> This could be because it was easier to send out the same information to everyone, rather than spend time selecting what to send to each delegation. All the areas for improvement indicated in the survey could have been addressed given more administration staff in the SOL Games office. Those suggesting improvements usually recognised the massive task of organising an SOGB National Summer Games. The Head of Delegation for the South East Region, for example, commented that:

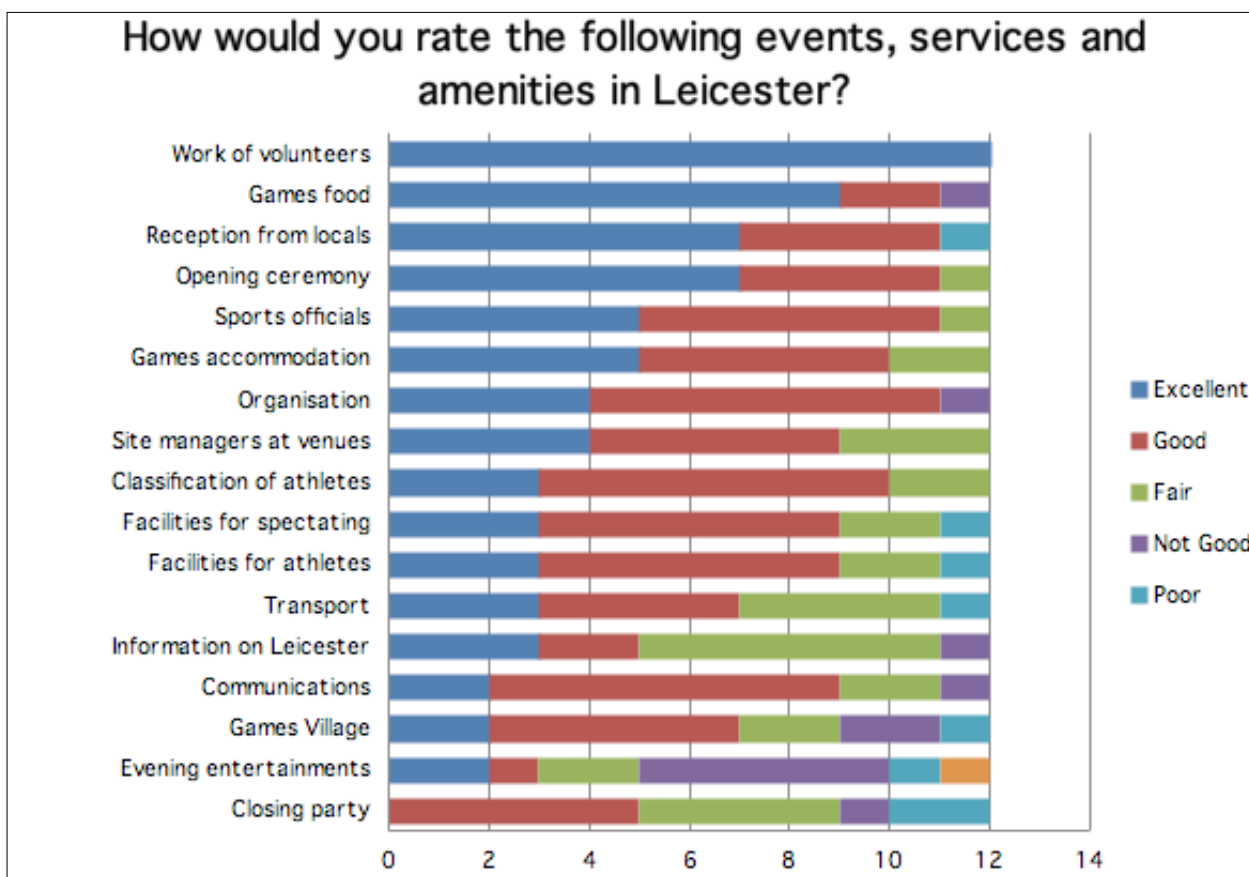
*[The] Games require a lot of paperwork which takes a huge amount of time to get completed. For those who are able, then, I think electronic means of completion of documentation would allow HODs [Heads of Delegation] more time and encourage more volunteers to come forward for staff roles at future events.*<sup>94</sup>

10.5 Of course, when organising an event of this size there will always be *some* administrative problems. It is how such problems are dealt with and resolved that defines an event of this scale. Delegation heads had clearly recognised this point in their responses to a supplementary question about what, in their view, had worked especially well at the Games. Here there were comments such as, 'a positive experience, problems addressed smoothly and sensitively' and that the Leicester staff 'did a fantastic job'. The delegation heads were asked to rate some of the key events and features of the Games on a scale ranging from Excellent to Poor (Figure 10.1). The most popular and successful aspect of the Games, according to the responses received, was the work of the volunteers. This was judged *unanimously* by respondents to the Head of Delegation survey to have been excellent.

10.6 The Heads of Delegation, of course, would have been working closely with the volunteers during the week of the Games, so this praise is well informed, based on detailed knowledge of the volunteers' roles and how they were performed. The next most popular service was the food served during the Games, which drew the comment:

*The food at the accommodation was well prepared, tasty and varied. The catering staff was also very flexible and accommodating. The packed lunches were, for many people, excessive but were of good quality.*

Food was followed closely in the ranked list of amenities and events at the Games by the Opening Ceremony and the reception the delegations received from local people. Least successful from the point of view of our survey of HODs were the evening entertainments – about which we have also reported some criticisms – and the Games Closing Party.



**Figure 10.1: Amenities and services as ranked by Heads of Delegation**

10.7 To get some more detailed responses on services and events, the Heads of Delegation were asked to say more about aspects of the Games listed above, the role of SOGB, or about

any other services and facilities at the 2009 Games. We wanted to know more about what went well and what could have been improved upon, at least from a HOD's perspective. The comments received in this instance included both positive and negative cases, and each response was different. Some of these issues have been discussed earlier, but other positive points raised by the HODs surveyed included: *'The Opening Ceremony was excellent'; 'The pre-Games Conference was well organised and informative'; 'The standard of volunteers was excellent'; 'Medical services were very good: the hospital was quick and efficient and first aid was thorough'; 'The catering was excellent'; 'HOD meetings were reasonably timed and well chaired'*.

10.8 For one region's Head of Delegation, for whom this was their fifth National Games, Leicester's was described as the least problematic Games experienced so far. Another, more frequent, comment was that the volunteers were 'the best' the HODs had worked with at any Games. For example, 'the volunteers were undoubtedly the best that I have experienced and no-one had a bad word to say about any of them'. For two respondents, the Leicester Opening Ceremony was remembered as something particularly enjoyable, while another praised the entertainment outside the Walkers Stadium that kept the athletes amused as they waited to enter the arena. A number of the Heads of Delegation enjoyed the experience of, 'being given a car to travel to venues' but it was also said that, 'the HOD hire cars worked OK, but as the week went on personally I felt concerned that it was not a good idea to be doing so much driving in an unfamiliar city whilst getting more tired every day.' Another appreciated the medical screening for the athletes through the Healthy Athlete programme in the Games Village. One HOD summed up the experience and what had been enjoyable about the Games as follows: 'Everything was as near perfect as any event of this kind could be' and still another that the Leicester Games had been, 'an impossible act to follow.'

10.9 However, some of our respondents reported that during the week of the Games there was no Games transport available during the day so athletes which might allow athletes opportunities to go to other venues. This is especially important to some competitors who have

friends competing in other sports or who want to cheer on their regional teams at different events during their own competitive 'downtime'. It also affected athletes who had performed early in the day and now wanted to leave the sports site to do something else. This meant that the Games probably lacked a really strong sense of solidarity between disciplines and competitors and this was only partially overcome by the collective celebrations promoted by the opening and closing ceremonies. A number of HODs commented on this issue; indeed it was one of those which most exercised our respondents. But they often flavoured their critiques with a strong dose of realism about the 'theory' and then the complexities of seamlessly delivering transport to everyone's satisfaction for an event on this scale:

*Transport has always been a problem at every Games I have been to. The organisers always believe it will work as planned, but has to be changed as the week goes on and many people are left frustrated. The best bit of the transport provided [in Leicester] was the emergency cover for those left behind at sites through no fault of their own. The worst bit was the lack of transport during the day to take athletes and families around other venues to support their team when the athletes did not have competition themselves. This worked quite well in Glasgow but was non-existent in Leicester.*

10.10 *Accommodation* arrangements were a disappointment – and more – to some delegations. This reflected, claimed some, a dissonance between generated expectations and the consistency of what was actually on offer when the Games finally came round. A useful suggestion made regarding accommodation was that the organisers, 'should inform delegations if the facilities do not meet the required standard.' Another HOD suggested that organisers should, 'make sure the accommodation is right for each delegation which would be helped by holding the Games Conference and visits to the accommodation earlier in the year.' Accommodation for the physically disabled was described as 'appalling' by one respondent and another delegation head claimed that they had seriously considered withdrawing the region and returning home because the standard of accommodation initially allocated to them was lower than their requirements. The problem was eventually resolved and the team was moved to another, more satisfactory, building. Accommodation is an especially sensitive and complex area of concern, of course, precisely because of the range of disabilities exhibited among athletes.



10.11 There were a number of problems reported at some of the Leicester venues and also in relation to particular *sporting events*, and some of these were highlighted by our HOD respondents. One respondent said the experience of the Games was wholly positive ‘apart from cycling.’ Here the problem seemed to one of safety compounded by the poor weather. It was the alleged inappropriate size and facilities which caused problems at the gymnastics, but also especially at the swimming competitions. For swimming, it was a recurring complaint that where there was simply not enough room to accommodate all the spectators who had come to support individual athletes or cheer for their regional team. One respondent was also concerned about the issue of occupying the time of swimmers who were not competing but who could not be housed around the pool:

*The comments of “poor” for athletes and spectating facilities apply in particular to the swimming pool, where the swimmers were very bored in the hall adjacent to the pool and the spectators’ ticketing system early on in the week was not good. The volunteers who accompanied swimmers were denied access to the spectator area, even though they were parents of swimmers. Swimming is always a big sport for Special Olympics Summer games and future host cities need to be very clear that they have a suitable venue that will include swimmers and coaches/escorts to be part of the atmosphere in the pool before offering to host the Games.*

Even here, however, there was also praise for local organizers who were battling against the odds in a difficult situation for all.

10.12 Several respondents were dubious about the entertainment offered to families and athletes in the evenings or between competitions, though the City Council had provided a number of events as part of an extensive cultural programme leading up to the Games. A number of HODs, for example, thought that general arrangements for the Leicester *Games Village* could have been improved. Criticisms were typically that the Village was not in the most convenient location, at the Walkers Stadium where no SO sporting events were actually taking place and that it did not accord to its advertised availability. Its ‘restricted’ – and inconsistent – opening hours also meant that not all athletes had access to the Village at a time when they

were free to do so. 'This [the Games Village] was badly located, as it was not easily accessible to all athletes – and when sports had finished the village was closed.' One Head of Delegation summarized this general set of concerns by drawing on personal experience:

*There were only two occasions that I was able to visit the Village. The first time I arrived after the stated opening time and three-quarters of the Village was closed. The second time was on the Friday morning and it was advertised that the Village would be open until 2pm. On arriving at the Village at approximately 10.30am most of it had been dismantled. If you advertise it's open then it should be!*

10.13 What we might call the Games 'social programme', more generally, also came in for some criticism. 'The social programme was poor,' was one pithy response, though one respondent remarked that the evening entertainment was beyond comment because, 'By the time the day's work had been done and dinner eaten, there was no time to attend any social events.' Another reported that: 'The shopping night [in the Highcross Centre] was a disaster.' The shopping event was overcrowded, according to some participants, 'To the point of dangerousness.' Anticipating a lack of appealing things for athletes to do in the evening, one resourceful delegation had even brought its own disco equipment, which the Head of Delegation concerned believed had, 'saved the sanity of the coaches, volunteers, as the athletes could not wait for the disco each night.' Not all the accommodation that housed athletes had the same – or much – recreation facilities in this vein. For one delegation, for example:

*There was very little at the accommodation, other than table tennis and some films to watch. This was inadequate for the numbers using the accommodation and less than what was available for other teams.*

Large number of young people based together with no transport and few facilities can be a difficulty in almost any context – especially when organizers are, understandably, focused on successfully delivering a sporting day within a limited budget.

10.14 The source of most criticism was the Games Closing Party which was specifically critiqued by half of our responding HODs. One respondent simply asserted that, 'The closing ceremony

was poor,’ while another described it forcefully as, ‘a disaster’. The speeches, it was generally agreed, were too long for the athletes, who were left standing in the rain with nothing to do. The event was damaged, ‘by far too many people saying exactly the same thing. As a result many athletes were disappointed that the ABBA tribute band’s set was cut short.’ Security at the Closing Party was another important issue. Catering at the Closing Party was outside the athletes’ boundaries, which caused problems for some delegation heads and carers when athletes wanted to buy food. Against guidelines, some parents had managed to get into the party enclosure for athletes, volunteers and coaches, and this provoked some additional potential safety problems. At least one delegation left the event early because of this difficulty.

10.15 We offered some opportunities for our respondents to comment about – reflecting on their Leicester experience – what could be improved for future Games. There was some obvious overlap here with the responses given to the previous question. The closing ceremony, some evening entertainment and shopping evening issues, matters of transport from the shopping evening and between venues, accommodation for the disabled, the standard of accommodation, teams not being lodged together, and swimming arrangements all featured again here. One respondent added that there should be ‘more support’ for relatives and carers. A suggestion to assist in organisation was to look at the use of more IT by delegations during the week of the Games. One respondent recommended having: ‘Sufficient staffing levels in administration from the outset and staff that have experience who can deal with this type of event.’

10.16 *Communications* were also a concern for some of our respondents. One complained that the second hand mobile phones they were supplied with for the Games were ‘terrible’, proving difficult to receive a signal. Another issue raised was that, ‘Not having internet or email access at the accommodation meant that some communication was arriving late at the accommodation.’ One HOD, exploring similar territory, argued convincingly that it, ‘would be useful if organisers of future Games could think about the use of IT to get information on the programmes for the following day to delegations, rather than have these handed out to heads

of delegation at evening meetings.’ Also concerning the use of IT and a reduction in paperwork, another delegation head hoped that an,

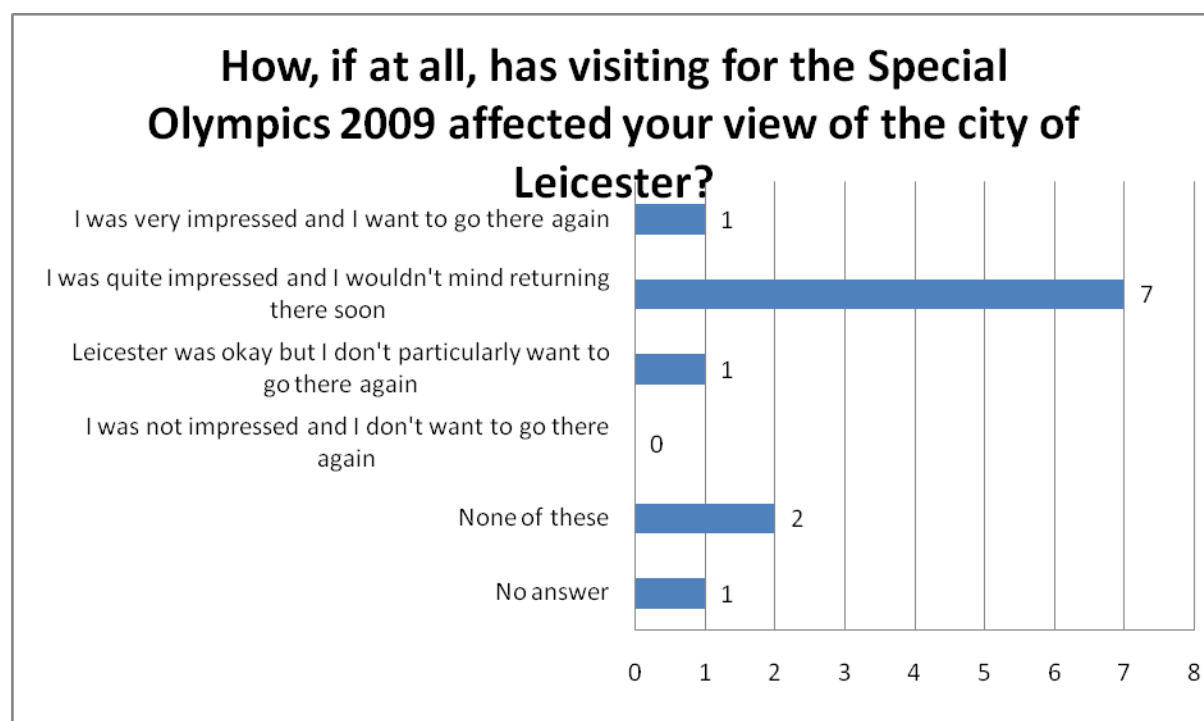
*Improvement of technology will allow greater use of digital equipment, so the provision of laptops and 3G connections would allow all teams to be easily kept informed of what is happening without the need for large amounts of paper to be circulated and carried. However, unless local printing is also provided, then things like bus timetables being posted in halls will still need to be done.*

10.17 A potentially more serious, problem raised by at least one Head of Delegation related directly to more specific worries over *security* at the Games. This is a significant matter, especially considering the safety of athletes and the requirements that volunteers be CRB checked before they can be recruited for work on the Games. Here it was reported that, under the general administrative burden, the passes for volunteers arrived too late, which meant, in this view, that:

*Security was non-existent. In fact I did not receive almost all of my volunteers’ passes until the week after the Games had finished, when they were sent to my home. And even then the majority of them were still wrong. I was not approached or had my pass checked at any venues.*

10.18 These criticisms and issues relating to the way the Leicester Games were organised were offered as examples of things that did not go well and which could be improved for the next National Summer Games. But we should stress that Heads of Delegation were generally very supportive of Leicester and very responsive to some of the problems the organizers faced. One HOD recognised pertinently that Leicester had had only two years to plan for the Games and concluded that, ‘the National Games need four years to plan and that SOGB needs to put in a full-time officer for the last twelve months to work alongside the organisers.’ The vast majority of athletes and many of the delegations experienced no serious problems during the Games week in Leicester. For example, another HOD concluded, approvingly, that: ‘It would be hard to improve on the Leicester Games, it would help to base the organisation of the next Games on the Leicester model.’

10.19 The Heads of Delegation surveyed were asked: ‘How, if at all, has visiting for the Special Olympics National Games affected your views of Leicester?’ We provide a simple summary of their responses to a number of fixed categories in Figure 10.2. Most respondents were at least ‘quite impressed’ by the city and expressed that they might consider returning soon. One HOD commented: ‘I was very impressed, and I want to go there again.’ Involvement in some events – swimming was a good example – meant that there was very little time for many competitors and family members to engage with the city at all. Swimmers and their coaches and supporters were occupied by their sport almost constantly. Most of the HODs were busy, even in the evenings when they had meetings. One confirmed that they ‘did not have a lot of time to see the city, but our one evening out we walked [around] the city shopping area ... had a meal and a few [people] said it would be good to come back and explore [Leicester] for a weekend.’



**Figure 10.2 Special Olympics and perceptions of Leicester**

10.20 The final question in the survey was: ‘How important is Special Olympics for families and carers and for the athletes involved? What are the benefits, if any, of being involved and also

what are the drawbacks, if any?’ Heads of Delegation used their considerable experience here to report on their own observations on the likely benefits to athletes. We return to this issue later in our survey of families. Our respondents here emphasised the perceived improvements in social skills, confidence, self-esteem and health and fitness of athletes that are also noted elsewhere in this report. One respondent said, for example:

*Our family has been involved Special Olympics for 12 years. Time and again we’ve seen new athletes become fitter and stronger, improve their sporting prowess, increase their self-esteem and become better able to mix socially.*

Another respondent described the enormous commitment and effort that is needed by all those involved and how Special Olympics can also raise a wider awareness of learning disability in society:

*Special Olympics is hugely important for athletes, families and carers. I have been involved with SO for 25 years now and I am inspired by the dedication, work and sportsmanship all the athletes show and although the immediate reaction on the day after the Games is, “I am not doing that again!” virtually all involved after seeing what the athletes, families and carers get out of it leaves us all inspired to start planning for the next time. Athletes talk about their own experiences for months and even years after events like the Summer Games. It also gives the public opportunities to recognise that SO athletes are every bit as dedicated as professional sportsmen and women and even get public recognition for their achievements, which are well deserved.*

10.21 Commenting further on the importance of Special Olympics for athletes and family members, and again recognising how the National Games can raise awareness of learning disability within the wider community, one HOD argued that:

*Special Olympics offers the chance to train, take part in competitions at all levels and show the world that anyone with a learning disability makes a contribution to our society and deserves recognition for that.*

Crucially, parents, too, need encouragement in their role as carers. They need to be motivated to continue supporting their athlete’s endeavours, as the following HOD response confirms:

*When your son or daughter takes part in a Special Olympics event and gets recognition at their level, the improvement in self-esteem is huge. The sheer joy that brings and lasting improvement in confidence is right in front of you and helps you to continue to care.*

Another delegation head wrote on the specific importance of the commitment of family members working in a voluntary capacity to service Special Olympics also as spectators:

*The Special Olympics programme is massively important to the families of Special Olympians. Many families contribute enormously to the fundraising efforts of individual teams and many families make the trip to the Games to support team members. Without families there would be few spectators. For many families the Games become a way of life leading up to the event and throughout the Games themselves. Memories of the Games remain for years thereafter.*

*The Special Olympics are vitally important as it gives families, friends and carers the opportunity to see the athletes in action at their sports, which on a daily basis at home they may not be able to do – this can only improve the regard in which an athlete is held, and is extremely satisfying for the athletes to know that someone they know is watching and supporting them.*

10.22 Finally, notwithstanding the organisational issues and concerns we have been carefully reviewing here, it is always important to remember that the SOGB National Summer Games – to repeat a sporting cliché – is really ‘all about the athletes’. Their enjoyment is paramount. Emphasising this point, one HOD commented that despite the lack of shared sporting venues the Leicester Games were both successful and compact, and that it would live in the memory of many athletes for some time:

*My athletes have returned home with fantastic experiences and memories that they will talk about for months and years to come. Leicester as a city was a good choice (apart from the swimming venue) as many of the facilities were relatively close together. The best bit for many of the athletes is that they are talking about the next Games because they had such a good time in Leicester.*

## 11. The Athletes' Experience

11.1 Following the discussion so far, about the bid process and Games preparations, the Special Olympics finances, the organisation of the event and the opinions and experiences of senior administrators and the Heads of Delegation, we return here to the perspective of the *athletes* – the key figures in the National GB Summer Games. Athletes make a considerable personal commitment to train and prepare for the Games, of course, something which can involve a pledge to sport and training for several times a week over a number of years. Special Olympics is a very important part of the lives of many competitors, not only for the week of Games competition but also for their all-year-round exercise and sporting competition involved in the Special Olympics programme. But the four-yearly National Games Week is certainly one of the pinnacles of an athlete's sports experience, and so the athlete's perspective must be a central component of our evaluation of Leicester 2009.

11.2 In her use of oral history techniques Jan Walmsley has outlined some of the important practical and ethical challenges researchers can face in interviewing people with learning disabilities. In particular, she points out that there is often an unequal relationship between researchers and the people under study in projects such as this one. People with learning disabilities might well lack a researcher's formal skills, and even basic ones such as literacy, as well as also lacking a wider understanding of their own history and social status.<sup>95</sup> We have worked very much with these points in mind and have been aided in the research process in addressing some of these practical and ethical difficulties by having a field researcher who has had some considerable experience of work in educational settings with young people with learning disabilities.<sup>96</sup>



Area	Population (millions)	Special Olympic Athletes at National Summer Games 2009
Rest of England	44.0 (80.3%)	1501 (60.7%)
Great London	7.5 (13.7%)	46 (1.9%)
Scotland	5.5 (9.5%)	775 (31.3%)
Wales	3.0 (5.5%)	150 (6.1%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54.7 (100%)</b>	<b>2472 (100%)</b>

**Table 11.1 Populations and athletes at National Summer Games 2009**

Region	Number of Athletes
<b>ENGLAND</b>	
South West	24
Southern	204
Greater London	46
South East	159
Eastern	104
East Midlands	170
West Midlands	302
Yorkshire and Humberside	170
North West	175
Northern	193
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1547</b>
<b>WALES</b>	150
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	
Highland	72
Grampian	58
Fife	103
Lothian	73
Borders	37
West Scotland	267
Tayside	110
Forth Valley	55
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>775</b>

Source: *Special Olympics GB, Leicester 2009, Souvenir Programme*, p.10.

**Table 11.2: Distribution by region of athletes at National GB Summer Games, 2009**

11.3 As Tables 11.1 and 11.2 respectively show, the 2472 competing athletes at the 2009 Games were drawn from across most of the regions of Britain. But the spread of SO athletes is also highly inconsistent, reflecting perhaps that learning disability may be unevenly spread across Britain but more likely the rather patchy development of the Special Olympics national movement in Britain. Local promotion and sustenance of the Special Olympics concept and practice often depends on the work and energy of individual proselytizers, the level of support offered by volunteers or family members, and/or the resources and backing of sympathetic individuals, local authorities and other bodies. We can see some of the impact of these local inputs in these figures. Special Olympics seems very strong indeed in Scotland, but has little impact in the South West of England (24 athletes), or especially in Greater London, which produced just 46 athletes (fewer than 2% of the total) for the 2009 National Summer Games.

11.4 These figures suggest that someone with a learning disability in parts of Greater London has effectively little or no chance of competing in the National Summer Games, whereas a Scottish person with a learning disability has a disproportionately favourable chance of doing the same. This may be because official bodies and boroughs in London have decided on different policies – and sporting opportunities – for people with learning disabilities. The Scottish authorities by the same token are unusually supportive of Special Olympics. Importantly for Scottish athletes their participation is bolstered through state subsidies. This uneven distribution of SO opportunity in England may, simply, be because it is more difficult to establish volunteer-led Special Olympics in larger urban centres than it is in town, or more rural, settings. Whatever the explanation, the 2009 National Games boasted a wide range of athletes in terms of their geographical positioning, but it was certainly not one that reflected the picture regarding the national spread of potential learning disability athletes.

11.5 In addition to this uneven spread of opportunities for athletes, SOGB has strict rules over which athletes can participate in the National Summer Games. In keeping with its overall ethos of participation over excellence, new athletes are now typically restricted to two appearances at National Summer Games – though at least some of those who competed in Leicester were

longstanding Games athletes. This limitation is partly due to the need to satisfy SOGB's growing number of athletes. In 2004, there were 6,723 special Olympic athletes, rising to around 8,500 in 2009. Only three-out-of-ten of the latter actually competed in the National Games in Leicester, though some of these were likely to have been self-excluded because of the costs of attendance for athletes and carers. Of course, extending the impact of Special Olympics – for example to larger urban areas – may produce very large numbers of athletes who could not easily be accommodated in the current Summer Games programme. Apart from the quadrennial Summer Games, SOGB also offered an extensive network of regional competitions and training programmes.<sup>97</sup> We will return to these issues later in the report.

11.6 The Games Opening Ceremony is experienced by almost all the Special Olympics athletes, of course, and the impact of the huge crowd and the spectacular entertainments on offer is often a memorable one for athletes, families and spectators alike, and 2009 was no exception to this general rule. As we have already seen, it took some time for all the regional teams to enter the Walkers Stadium and to be seated. An East Midlands athlete, whose regional squad was last to enter the stadium as the hosts, was excited and largely unperturbed by the delay. The anticipation of stadium entry was: 'Really good. We were in last, so there was a bit of hanging around.' In fact, the wait outside the Walkers was especially enjoyable for many athletes, precisely because it provided an unexpected opportunity to socialize. One East Midlands athlete said: 'Yeah, we were waiting. We were not standing still. We were moving round and round and round.' When asked if he actually *liked* the experience outside he replied, 'It was lovely, yeah.' The athlete's mother then confirmed, 'I suppose they'd be chatting to all their old friends from all the other places.' Athletes outside also had time to take in some peripheral attractions.

*Everyone was like: 'Hiya!' and we were just sitting on the ground. It was really hot and we were like 'Is it time yet?' and everyone was going through and we were sitting there. It was good, though. We saw a bit more outside – people as statues and throwing stuff at us. They were throwing balloons at us. There was entertainment outside.*<sup>98</sup>

11.7 What did it feel like to enter a packed Special Olympics arena and to walk around in front of tens of thousands of wildly cheering people? An athlete from the South East Region said with typical understatement that it was just, 'Lovely.' A West Midlands athlete mentioned how his was the biggest team at the Opening Ceremony: this golfer 'Cyril' was surprised – and delighted – to see an image of himself on the stadium monitor. 'Coming into the stadium and there's me on this big screen!' The sheer scale of the event was a thrilling, and slightly disturbing, feature for one male athlete from the North West Region who found the whole process to be, 'Nerve wracking! I was nervous. I thought the people of Leicester must have been praying for us to walk on there. It was really good. When I saw them I thought: "There's loads" [of spectators].' The Leicester-based tennis player and Games Ambassador Zara Jurenko enjoyed her own personal stadium reception, as well as the collective sense of celebration and support emanating from the vast crowd: The experience for her was:

*Really good. Loads of people were shouting my name, 'Zara, Zara'...There were a lot of people there for Special Olympics. You know, for Special Olympics, having people turn up. But when you saw the crowd you're thinking 'Wow!' There's loads of people there to congratulate us!*

11.8 Another athlete from the East Midlands, Miles, said the Opening Ceremony was simply 'Brilliant', an event which combined support from strangers and those dearest to him and which made him feel, 'Proud, Leicester made me proud. I can't believe it 'cos all my friends there. Clive and my mum, my dad and Lee and that's it.' He remembered, especially, when he finally emerged from the stadium tunnel the 'Cheers, clapping' and if the East Midlands team came out last as hosts, he did not seem to object too much: 'Next time we'll come first!' He remembered seeing some famous people among the Games Ambassadors on the night, including footballer Steve Walsh and rugby coach Martin Johnson. But he also had a brief audience with the Prime Minister Gordon Brown, which he took in his stride: 'Oh yes, I did, yeah. [He] shook my hand. [He] said hello to me. And the [former] Lord Mayor – [I] saw her as well.' John, an experienced Special Olympics golfer from the North West Region was very enthused by the Leicester Opening Ceremony: 'That was one excellent show! The best I've been

to. All the people [there]: dragons and the flames, and all that sort of thing. The dragons were made of silk.'

11.9 How did our small group of athletes respond to the Opening Ceremony speeches, which had been criticised by some other members of the audience and by some delegation officials for being inappropriate and too lengthy? 'Miles' remembered, approvingly, the athletes' representative on the stage that evening: 'Oh yeah, I liked that Lee Penfold.' Leicester basketball player Penfold, represented athletes on the Games Organising Committee and was one of the evening's hosts. Were there too many speeches for Lee? 'No, I liked it'. 'John' also had no problem with the night's speeches, which were simply, 'Very, very nice' and he added, with obvious approval, 'Mr Shriver.' Cyril agreed: 'It was very nice how they spoke to us all.' The content of the speeches may not have had an impact on all the Special Olympics athletes, but they did offer a sense of pomp and occasion to the Ceremony, a formal counterpoint to the tumbling and fantasy creatures performing on stage. They helped signify, perhaps above all in their official guise, the *importance* of Special Olympics to those who were directly involved.

11.10 The *Games Village* was discussed with the athletes. Some had good access to the facilities, others less so. John said 'I didn't go to the Games Village' and Cyril added, 'We didn't know where it was.' In contrast, 'It was really good,' was Zara's verdict. She had made good use of the Healthy Athletes facility. 'I went down and had my feet checked out, eyes, ears and everything.' She went to the Family Evening at the Village but could remember none of the Games attractions there, though she did recall the dancing and bands. William and some of his East Midlands friends were able to go to the Games Village a few times after their evening meal and he remembered that 'Some nights we had entertainment.' Keith visited the Games Village with some power-lifting friends from the Southern Region on the Monday afternoon of the Games, when parts of the Village were closed due to torrential rain. When asked if he liked the Games Village, Miles thought it was 'good fun.' When prompted by his mother he recalled in more detail: 'Tents, games, building like a workshop.'

11.11 Problems with transport had been described by respondents in both the family and Heads of Delegation survey. How, if at all, did this issue affect the Games athletes? There clearly had been some impact, as Zara recalled: 'Getting there and back (to venues) was obviously a bit ... Obviously, we had to wait a few times, for transport and stuff.' Keith, however, did not notice any problems and he had also managed to go to the Games Village during the day. The golfers from the North West Region were unaware of any transport problems because they had their own region's mini-bus to take them to the Humberstone Heights course. William was aware that some bus drivers had been affected by swine flu and had been sent home, which may have explained some of the transport problems. Steve said the transport in Leicester was 'OK' but added: 'Sometimes it [bus] was a bit late. Not always on time. We went to the big market one night (Highcross) and we had to wait in rain for the coach there and got soaking wet.'

11.12 The Special Olympics volunteers received as much praise and gratitude from the athletes as they had from other participants in the 2009 Games. 'The volunteers were excellent' was Zara's verdict, while for Lee, 'Meeting the basketball volunteers' was the thing he enjoyed most about the Games. He added: 'They were fantastic, they made us feel welcome.' William praised the escorts at the Walkers Stadium, and he wrote glowingly about volunteers in his own report on the Games at the poolside:

*The volunteers were good getting the swimmers ready for their races. They supported us while we waited in and out of the pool before and after races. The pool staff were very good in helping the swimmers in the pool and bringing our kit when we had finished our races ... I did not have any problems in the swimming and the volunteers were very good in getting the swimmers ready for their races and supported the entire swimmers. The pool staff were very good in supporting and helping the swimmers. Every morning when all the swimmers, especially the East Midlands team, walked in the building all the volunteers in swimming stood to one side in a line and gave us cheers and clapping as we walked into the pool area.<sup>99</sup>*

11.13 Keith agreed that, 'The volunteers were really helpful, all of them, really nice.' Richard from the West Midlands reported (rather proudly) that, 'We played the volunteers [at basketball] at the end - and beat them.' Steve praised the first aid volunteers of St John

Ambulance Brigade who looked after him when he was injured and needed physiotherapy for his knee. 'The volunteers were very helpful and kind' said John. Cyril echoed this point and also remarked, 'They showed you where the toilets were and all that.' Miles said the volunteers were: 'Alright, yeah... They gave us drinks and sandwiches' and he mentioned that he has seen some volunteers around the city since the Games. They had both recognised and talked to him, so some new friendships had resulted from the Games experience.

11.14 But for the athletes, of course, the most important things about the Games Week were the venues and the sporting competition. The venues varied between new and old, and public and private. Based at a private tennis club, unsurprisingly Zara thought the facilities were, 'really good' for her sport. Cyril also liked the course at the superior Humberstone Heights club and John said of the course:

*It was a challenge for me. There were loads of lakes and quite a few bunkers, which I can't resist. These were deep and it took me quite a time to get out of them!*

East Midlands basketball player Lee Penfold said: 'It was exciting [playing] at the John Sandford Sports Centre. Beating the West Midlands twice for the first time was a dream come true for the team.' The gymnastics competition took place in a completely new facility at New College Leicester, but it was one which did not have the spectator capacity to host the large number of spectators and family members expected at the event. Miles described this location for his event as a 'Gym hall' and that 'I like the place.' He remembered that, 'I like all the families watching us.' When asked if the families were able to watch he replied, 'Yes, thank you, yeah.' But Miles's mother, Rhona, added:

*There was only the one [problem], the venue, the hall. We were just a bit disappointed all the families couldn't come, because it was small. That was the only problem.*

For William, who took part in the swimming events, the venue and some aspects of the organisation of the competition did not impress him at all. This inspired him to prepare a written report, which he duly sent to SOGB:

*When I saw the pool for the first time I was not impressed as there was not enough seating for all the people to sit and watch the swimming. The parents had to queue and [could] only watch their sons or daughters swimming.*

11.15 William recognised that ‘the public would find it difficult to get the tickets and that’s why they did not turn up to watch the swimming’. He was also critical of the way the medal ceremonies were organised for the swimming competition:

*When we won the races we went outside to a marquee to get our medals. Sometimes we had to wait a long time to get our medals and the staff did not know which races we were in and that’s why, sometimes, it took [too] long to get our medals. One night all the East Midlands swimmers had to wait about four hours for some of the swimmers to get their medals and we were late for our meal.*

11.16 Steve was very happy with the athletics event and he had good cause: he had performed well in his competitions, the 100 metres, and the standing long jump:

*I rung my mum and I told her I’d won a gold medal and mum was over the moon. She got me to ring my nan up and she was dead pleased. And I took the medals back home with me on a home visit. I showed all my family and friends and they all supported me.*

Miles was happy, too, because he had won the overall gold medal for his level in gymnastics after winning a total of seven individual medals. When asked how he felt about his achievements he told us: ‘I can’t believe it, I can’t believe it. I – winning. I can’t help it, cos I’m the best one in Shepshed, here.’ About winning the gold medal, Miles said: ‘I feel happy and proud. And my family was happy as well. They feel proud – and crying as well.’ Richard’s West Midlands basketball team were rather less successful. They had ‘got hammered by Scotland. They won, unbeaten.’ After winning silver medals in power lifting, Stevie of the South East Region was so excited he ended up hugging all his friends. His friend Keith, in a different weight category, had higher aspirations than the fourth place ribbons he was awarded. He shook hands with his opponents but afterwards was very upset and said he planned to give up lifting. When contacted by the legacy team a few months later however he had largely forgotten the Leicester disappointment and had been reassured by his coach that he had done well.



11.17 William admitted – as any *professional* athlete might – that he had felt ‘under pressure’ to do well in his event as the competition was in Leicester, not far from where he lives and where a lot of people know him. Before a competition Miles confessed that, ‘Sometimes but I’m a bit nervous about the medals, and that.’ But when asked if these nerves really bothered him, he replied: ‘Not really. I just like it really. It’s good fun.’ Asked how she had felt during the tennis competition in which she won a gold medal in both single and doubles, Zara reflected on the importance of experience, especially since she had played a visibly upset opponent in the semi-finals:

*I can feel nervous when people are watching but I’ve played so many competitions I block them out now so I don’t have to think. I used to worry and I’d say to my mum, ‘No, you can’t watch me’ but now I’m fine. I get a bit worried if I’m losing a game and thinking everyone’s watching me but I just block out now ... At the start of a game I feel really nervous but tennis is just the thing I do, so!*

11.18 Both visiting and more local athletes were asked what impressions they had gained of Leicester during their stay. However, while most responses here were generally positive, most athletes had had little opportunity to see much of the city. As they live in Leicestershire, William, Zara and Miles were already quite familiar with the city. But Zara thought that:

*People who don’t know Leicester too well, that live on the outskirts, will have seen Leicester more. I think in that week we brought more people into Leicester than I’d seen before.*

Zara also thought that having the National Games in Leicester might affect the way others might now regard people with learning disabilities in the area. ‘People could now be thinking the disabled can actually do something who thought before: “People in wheelchairs, they can’t do anything.” But now they’ve seen it.’ Miles said he liked having the Summer Games in the city, ‘Because I like Leicester, because we are near Shepshed.’ William asserted that he would have actually preferred to go to Southampton in 2009 because he enjoys seeing new places.

11.19 Of those athletes we spoke to who were from outside Leicestershire, Steve said: ‘We totally enjoyed ourselves when we got over there. It was a good experience, a different place to

go.’ Keith said he thought that being in Leicester was simply, ‘Lovely’, while for John, ‘Leicester was a very nice place to stay.’ James averred that Leicester’s were, ‘the best Games: You can come back and tell everyone ‘I’ve been to Leicester.’ Cyril said he had felt rather sad as the Games ended:

*Coming home on the last day and thinking I might not see it again. [I] wanted to stay as I’d like to have seen more of it. It made me happy to go to Leicester as it was the first time I’d been. It was a good experience to play golf and see all the people and those who arranged it, and all that.*

11.20 What was the best thing about the Leicester Games and the Special Olympics for these athletes? For Cyril it was: ‘Playing golf and the people playing.’ He ‘could have stayed another week to carry on.’ John felt that the Leicester Games were ‘better than any other Games’ he’d been to. Perhaps some athletes always feel the last Games they attended were the best? John had also enjoyed, ‘meeting old friends’ in Leicester. Zara described the sense of achievement that taking part in the Games can give:

*When you take part [in the Games] you feel it’s good to be going in Special Olympics. Because you think of the people who go in the normal Olympics and you feel really good. Just being proud of doing what you do.*

11.21 For Steve, just being picked for Special Olympics was reward enough – with all athletes receiving medals:

*In Special Olympics you think you’re going to try and do your best at the things you do, you think you’re going to go over there and when you get picked you’re just so happy. The best thing about Special Olympics is you don’t just have gold, silver and bronze: everybody goes away with something, fourth, fifth or sixth. Everybody gets a participation medal. Not like the Paralympics and Olympics, where you just get gold, silver and bronze.*

11.22 After the Leicester National Games, what next for the athletes? For the West Midlands group we interviewed, who all live in the same care home, life continues to centre – as for many other SO athletes – around training. For Richard and James that means working three times a week with the basketball club. Steve practices his athletics with a group of 30 to 40

other learning disabled athletes. Emphasising the importance of sport – and Special Olympics – in their lives, Steve said that if he couldn't play sport he would:

*Be gutted and bored in the evenings, when I've got nothing to do. Some people would get bored and I get bored very easily, when I don't do sports or when I don't get picked for things.*

The focus though cannot be just on sports training. This is because raising funds to enable the athletes to take part in Special Olympics is also an important matter. Matt, for example, is constantly involved in fund-raising and seeking sponsors. James said it cost the athletes £350 each to go to Leicester. Events like a Meatloaf tribute night, which raised £4,500 for Special Olympics athletes helped towards the costs, but the athletes themselves also had to save own money, as James confirmed.

11.23 Zara was looking forward to being part of the SOGB squad which is going to Poland for the European Special Olympic Games in September 2010. As she's already been to the World Games she won't be eligible to go to Athens in 2011 as a tennis player. But she is philosophical and agrees that:

*Everyone else has to have a go. You can't pick the same players again; other people want to try it out and obviously they have to pick the players that haven't been before. It's a shame I can't go, but you have to give other people a chance that haven't been before.*

11.24 After his disappointment at Leicester, Keith won a gold medal for power-lifting in a competition in Scotland in March 2010. His friend Stevie came second in his competition. In June, Keith, Stevie and their other close friend Terry, who are all from the same Southern Region group and day-centre in Brighton and Hove, are excited about going to the European Special Olympic power lifting championships in Austria. Keith is really pleased that all three of them have been picked to go. Cyril and John competed in a Special Olympics golf competition in Inverness in early May 2010. They are disappointed that their local council has changed its policy on concessionary admission to leisure facilities for people with learning disabilities. A new card has been introduced that gives the holders free access to leisure and sporting facilities

in the borough, but it does not include golf and so now they can't afford to practice. John's future ambition is, 'To play at the next National Games and to be a badminton player.' Cyril was also considering a change of direction. He 'likes bowls, table tennis as well.' For him what's important is, 'Taking part, if you didn't take part you'd just be at home.'

11.25 Miles went to compete in Jersey in May 2010, where he won another batch of medals for gymnastics and made headlines in his local paper. When asked about his future he says he hopes to carry on competing – but he might retire. At 29 he is the oldest person in his gymnastics club. Basketball and football are team sports Miles might like to take up in the future but his mother says it's difficult to find a suitable club for people with special needs and usually these are too far away for Miles to travel to easily. William received a community sports award from Leicestershire County Council in 2009 for his achievements in swimming over the last 20 years and his support for other young swimmers in his role as a voluntary instructor. He has achieved an assistant swimming teacher's qualification and helps out at school swimming lessons.

## 12. The Orange Army: the Special Olympics Volunteers

12.1 The role of volunteers is widely recognized today as contributing considerably, in both an economic and cultural sense, to the production of mega-sporting events, and public recognition of such volunteers is now widely recognized.<sup>100</sup> These once hidden 'unsung heroes' are seldom quite so taken for granted today, mainly due to their utter centrality in the mega-event process, because:

*... volunteers have become essential to the delivery of sport and recreation, adding several hundred dollars of value per capita to the contribution that sport and recreation make to gross domestic product ... Volunteers have become particularly vital for the delivery of special events, as most events now depend to some degree on volunteers for event planning and operations.*<sup>101</sup>

12.2 The role and development of volunteers is also a key domain for assessing the overall impact of a sporting mega-event such as Special Olympics which have pretensions to be, 'short-term events with long-term consequences'.<sup>102</sup> Five elements have been identified in making up the conceptual framework for much mega-event volunteering of the kind we are considering here. Firstly, that this activity is undertaken without expectation of monetary reward; secondly, that people must willingly give up their free time as volunteers without compulsion; thirdly, that there must be a beneficiary of the volunteer's services, other than or in addition to the volunteer; fourthly that such work is usually carried out for non-profit focused events; and fifthly that volunteers typically demonstrate a strong sense of loyalty to the organization involved and to its wider mission.<sup>103</sup>

12.3 Accordingly, volunteering is typically defined as any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to, close relatives, or to benefit the environment. In 2007 44% of the UK population was argued to be involved in some sort of formal volunteering i.e. as part of a group or organisation.<sup>104</sup> Volunteering today might also be located by some in the UK as part of the new national political agenda on the 'Big Society' or 'citizen action' and in this sense it is perhaps best depicted less as an altruistic act (which may not be in the volunteers' self-interest) but more as a pro-social activity (one which assists others while also not restraining or positively contributing to the wider goals of volunteers).<sup>105</sup> It might be expected in this context – and this seems to be suggested by our own research – that the sort of 'episodic' volunteers who typically support mega-events might also exhibit signs of a 'bounce-back' repeat volunteering pattern of behaviour.<sup>106</sup> Certainly, some younger SO volunteers in 2009 had expressed ambitions to volunteer again for the London Olympics in 2012, and some older Leicester volunteers already had some prior experience of volunteering, many with people with learning disabilities.

12.4 The volunteer programme for Special Olympics Leicester 2009 was managed by Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL). VAL is an organisation that acts locally to involve individual volunteers

and local groups in personal and professional development and in improving life in the city of Leicester and the county of Leicestershire. The work for the SOL 2009 volunteer programme was accommodated in VAL's Volunteering Team. This programme was connected to volunteer recruitment through the Volunteer Centre (a Job Shop for volunteering) project; to learning disability through VAL's VALUES stream (volunteering for people with a learning disability); and to sport through VAL's V-involved and Sport England funded projects.<sup>107</sup> From March 2008 a full-time SOL Volunteer Director was employed working alongside VAL's own Volunteer Director.<sup>108</sup> Both of them were members of the Games Organising Committee. The executive director of VAL was a member of the Board of Special Olympics Leicester, thus confirming VAL as a key organisation involved in delivering the Games at all levels. The recruitment of the team of Special Olympics volunteers was broadly the responsibility of VAL. SOGB's volunteer lead also played a key role in the development of the Games' volunteer programme, by acting in an advisory capacity and drawing on a well of previous Games' experience.<sup>109</sup> We have already discussed issues connected to the executive management of the Leicester volunteers at the 2009 Games. Here we are concentrating mainly on the experience of volunteers.

12.5 The effective recruitment and smooth operation of the 'Orange Army' or 'Team Orange' (so called because of the striking colour of their volunteer uniform) was absolutely key if the 2009 Games in Leicester were to be delivered successfully. Without well trained and trusted volunteers who could offer support and guidance to athletes and families and perform the myriad necessary minor tasks involved in staging all major events, the Games, simply, could not have taken place. There was certainly no funding available to *pay* for Games support workers such as these, though some employers – Leicester City Council among them – allowed staff additional annual leave if they wished to volunteer for the Games.<sup>110</sup> Because work on the Games was located in normal working hours it ruled out most people in full time employment unless they took leave. The most usual candidates for volunteering are typically students, the retired and the unemployed. The Leicester Games would rely upon the willingness of people from the region to value their experience of working on the Games. A further incentive in this respect was provided, for some as we have pointed out, by a number of potential 'carrots' on

offer: that being a volunteer at Special Olympics might usefully add to a CV for future employment in a difficult job market; and it might also aid those who had ambitions to volunteer for work at the rather more prestigious occasion of London 2012.

12.6 There were certainly initial concerns that even these incentives may not be enough. Volunteering is certainly big business in sport today. A total of 75,000 people applied to volunteer at the Sydney Olympics, 25,000 signed up to volunteer at the soccer World Cup finals in Germany in 2006, and 14,500 volunteers worked at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in the same year (2006).<sup>111</sup> But these are prestigious, global sporting events which dwarf the Special Olympics National Summer Games. Representatives from VAL went out to local ward meetings in Leicester and gave talks on Special Olympics at local community meetings and other civic events, as part of a marketing drive to recruit SO volunteers. Colleagues in other sectors of the organising committee – such as in marketing – also assisted in pushing the volunteer ‘message’ wherever there were potential recruits present. SOL, SOGB and VAL’s websites were all strongly used in the recruiting process in order to spread public awareness about the opportunities for volunteers.

12.7 As it turned out, these initial fears were misplaced. The aim was to recruit up to 1500 volunteers, but the perceived attractions of voluntary work on Special Olympics meant that a total of some 3,015 people expressed an interest in being involved in the Games as volunteers. Not all of them actually applied to be volunteers, and some were simply not available to take part in the Games because of other commitments.<sup>112</sup> Eventually, some 1,349 people applied to work on the Games and their applications proceeded to the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checking stage. Of these initial applicants, 1,245 were finally cleared by CRB checks; 83% of the original target for volunteers. Adverse reports were received for 61 potential volunteers, two of whom had to be rejected after being interviewed because of the nature of their criminal convictions.

12.8 Recruitment is one thing, but when pay is not there as both an incentive and constraint it is always likely that some recruits will not materialize. When it came to the week of the Games around 16% (about one in six) of those expected did not appear for work. VAL concluded that this level of absenteeism was probably best explained by potential volunteers acquiring full-time jobs in the period between being approved and the Games start date. These people – and others – were simply no longer available for Games work.<sup>113</sup> This might have been particularly true for younger recruits who may have found paid holiday work in the meantime.

As it transpired, the experience of Games Week showed that recruiting 1,500 volunteers locally would have been excessive. When the Games were in full flow and athletes were familiar with their terrain, it was clear that there were more volunteers at some sports than was strictly necessary. The 1,050 volunteers who were recruited locally and who turned up for work (70% of the target) were joined by about 500 volunteer officials and supporters from SOGB, which brought the grand total of officials and volunteers on SO duty up to just over 1,500 – or roughly three volunteers/officials for every five competing athletes, and an average of around 74 for each Games venue. Experience of the Leicester Games suggests that this ratio of volunteer per athlete was generally about right, especially considering the 21 different venues which had to be covered.<sup>114</sup> Some general volunteers did not have duties all of the time, so hitting original targets might have meant 450 extra volunteers who would probably have been superfluous to requirements. This would also have meant pushing up costs for CRB checks, food for volunteers, and the cost of uniforms.

12.9 The allocation of volunteers to their roles was undertaken in two stages: by the end of December 2008 the Volunteer Venue Team Managers (VVTMs) were in place, which left 1,000 general volunteers to be assigned to the different venue and functional teams.<sup>115</sup> With the appointment of the VVTMs a leadership structure was established in each venue.<sup>116</sup> It was the role of VVTMs to act as a link between the volunteers, venue staff, delegations and sports officials. After their own training the VVTMs ran venue-specific training events, in conjunction with venue staff. They allocated roles to the other volunteers in their teams and worked as team leaders during the week of the Games, allocating tasks, maintaining morale and liaising



with staff and officials. Part of the brief for the VVTMs was to try to create a positive and lively atmosphere in the venues for volunteers. To this end they instituted: volunteer notice boards; Games scrapbooks; end of the week parties and barbecues; and, later, Games reunions. The aim of all these innovations was to make contributing as a 2009 volunteer a socially rewarding exercise as well as something with a material and functional outcome.<sup>117</sup>

12.10 Due to the very tight Games budget, a number of organisational and financial issues arose concerning the volunteer team in the months leading up to the Games. One was the cost of the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks which were required for all volunteers. Another was the cost of supplying every volunteer with a Games uniform. Some of the costs of the orange polo shirts, caps, rain jackets and bum bags which made up the volunteer Games kit were met by financial support from official sponsors Lions Clubs International and the East Midlands Development Agency.<sup>118</sup> Leicester City Council led on organising the CRB checks, which was a lengthy and expensive process costing about £35 for each one, or over £47,000 in total. Some of the checks were completed only just in time for the event and because of some long delays in returning the relevant forms a small number of volunteers did not have clearance in time to take part in the Games. According to the official *Games Evaluation Report*, the Games Organising Committee spent a considerable amount of time and energy trying to implement a consistent approach to CRB checks for those working with vulnerable adults, which would fit with SOGB's policy and the differing interpretations of the subject by leading voluntary group and public sector agencies, which included VAL and Leicester City Council. For future Games it is important that host cities clarify the requirements in this area and take into consideration any likely future changes in the law before adopting a clear and consistent policy on CRB checking and its timing.<sup>119</sup>

12. 11 The volunteers were deployed in roles requiring a varying range of responsibilities, skills and experience. These ranged from the management or supervisory levels as Volunteer Venue Team Managers and Delegation Assistant Leaders – jobs needing specific sports skills and management knowledge and experience – to the more general roles, such as helping out in the

halls of residence, or as car park attendants. According to *A Year in Review*, the annual report of SOGB, the Orange Army in Leicester,

*ensured that the events started on time, medal ceremonies were directed, that transport ran smoothly and food was prepared on time, that accommodation was comfortable and, above all else, that the athletes received the support they required.*<sup>120</sup>

One of the many important lessons learnt and covered in VAL's own post-Games self-evaluation was that the organisation had, 'failed to communicate an understanding of the level of commitment that they were asking of individuals and how it would be the volunteers who would deliver large tracts of the Games'.<sup>121</sup> This suggests that many Leicester volunteers had to quickly reorient themselves to the wide range of duties they would be required to perform at the Games. Easily identifiable and seemingly ubiquitous in their bright orange garb, it would be the volunteers who were essentially the 'public face' of the 2009 Games – and indeed the key connection between Special Olympics and the city of Leicester.

12.12 In some ways it is the default position for all events of this kind that the unpaid volunteers are the people who perform heroically, against the odds, to keep the show on track. That is certainly part of the story from Leicester 2009. The volunteer contribution to the Games, in terms of their skills, sheer hard work, and good humour, was recognised and widely praised in feedback from virtually all sources associated with the 2009 Games. These include the SOL Board, SOGB, family and HOD survey returns, and interviews with spectators at the sporting venues. All of these sources emphasised the considerable contribution made by the unstinting work of the volunteers to the overall success of the Games. The *Games Evaluation Report*, produced by SOL, asserted simply that: 'the volunteers were the stars of the show, alongside the athletes'.<sup>122</sup> One of the main objectives of hosting the Special Olympics GB National Summer Games in Leicester in 2009 was that the presence of large numbers of athletes and supporters in the city might raise more awareness in the wider local population of people with learning disabilities. However, most Leicester residents had few opportunities to meet or mix with athletes and family members during their brief stay in the city. Instead it would be the 'Orange Army' of volunteers which would become the main vehicle of interaction and exchange

between the athletes and the local community. The majority of the 1,050 locally-recruited volunteers – some 676 of them (64%) – came from the city of Leicester, plus around 314 (30%) who came from the county.<sup>123</sup> The remaining 60 (6%) came from outside Leicestershire, including from as far afield as Blackpool, Cardiff, London and Plymouth. All of these ‘outside’ volunteers travelled to, and stayed in, Leicester at their own expense.

12.13 There was no age limit for volunteering because of the wide range of skills and duties involved in making the Games a success and because a substantial number of the athletes were also older than typical sports competitors. Accordingly, the volunteers recruited ranged from between 16 and 85 years of age. A number of the retiree volunteers were already volunteering in other capacities. It was also an aim of the volunteer programme to include as many individuals with learning disabilities as possible for volunteering duties. This goal produced some success: 81 people with a learning disability (almost 8% of the recruited volunteers) worked during the week of the Games, many of them paired with another (non-disabled) volunteer to offer support and assistance, if necessary.<sup>124</sup> Included in ‘Team Orange’, too, were 30 young offenders (almost 3% of all SO Games volunteers). Many of these young men worked at the power lifting venue using equipment loaned by their own young offenders’ institution. Finally, although the ‘Orange Army’ tab was an easy signifier for the volunteers, not all volunteers approved of the official Games kit – which was neither easy on the eye, nor the skin, despite its bonding properties. As one volunteer told us:

*The poly/cotton luminous orange polo shirts with the Lions club logo and 3" letters saying 'volunteer' on the back were issued to us and were really rather nasty items that I cannot imagine anyone has worn since, except to sleep in perhaps (the event manager could not bring himself to wear the kit). However, they did make the volunteers immediately identifiable and in a round-about way I think helped to make us a more unified and cohesive group, almost despite the uniform, as it were.*<sup>125</sup>

#### *Surveying the volunteers*

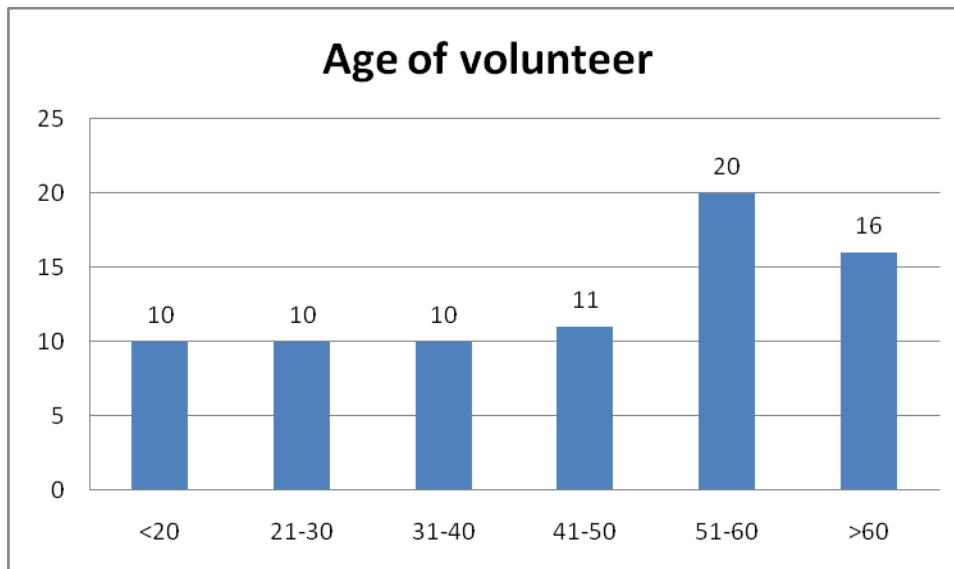
12.14 Soon after the Games ended, VAL conducted a volunteer survey to help in its own evaluation of the event and to monitor the quality of the volunteers’ experience. This postal

survey produced 151 responses. The results highlighted the claim that, for many of the respondents, being involved in Special Olympics was ‘one of the best things’ they had ever experienced. Of the respondents to the VAL survey, 93% said that they would volunteer again, 80% described their experience as ‘excellent’ and 19% as ‘good.’ Thus, VAL now had a database of largely satisfied volunteers who might be drawn on to assist at other sporting and cultural events, locally, regionally and even nationally. From VAL’s perspective, all the SO venues operated well during Games Week, and the volunteers generally pulled together well as a team. This was the general verdict produced in the VAL survey summary. In order to add more detail to this picture and to investigate a little more closely the experience of the volunteers, the Legacy research team contacted a quota sample of 200 Games volunteers in a mainly postal survey. We received 79 responses, a very reasonable response rate of 39.5%. However, in some of the figures reproduced below the numbers do not always total 79 either because not all respondents answered every question or the question was not applicable to them, or because respondents were able to offer more than one answer to the same question.

12.15 The Legacy volunteer sample comprised of 31 male (41%) and 45 (59%) female respondents. Three respondents did not identify themselves by sex. This seems to us, impressionistically at least, to be a reasonable reflection of the actual division of volunteers by sex. According to the *Games Evaluation Report*, this was the ‘most diverse volunteer team ever assembled’ in the city or in the county of Leicestershire.<sup>126</sup> The data on the make-up, by ethnicity, of the volunteer team collected by SOL, suggests that four-out-of-ten (39%) of all volunteers recruited were drawn from minority ethnic backgrounds. Our own perceptions at the Games certainly confirm the ethnic diversity of the volunteers – especially compared to athletes and families – but we would have estimated a rather lower figure than this one. However, the respondents to our volunteers’ postal survey paint a different picture again. Of those who reported on their ethnicity, only 17% (around one-in-six) of our respondents allocate to an identifiable ethnic minority. Of these, eight respondents were South Asian, two were African-Caribbean and two described themselves as being of mixed heritage.

12.16 We suspect that the SOL data might slightly exaggerate the diversity of those actually involved in the 2009 Games, while our own survey data almost certainly rather understates the number of SO volunteers who were drawn from ethnic minorities. We probably also understate the number of *younger* ethnic minority volunteers; our survey response is rather top-heavy with white, female, middle-aged volunteers, although our original sample was selected to try to reflect the diversity and age range of the volunteer group. We might also note that older volunteers are a common feature of mega-sporting events: for the Sydney 2000 Olympics one-half of those who applied to be volunteers were over 60 years of age.<sup>127</sup> Plenty of middle-aged female volunteers *were* indeed involved in servicing the 2009 Games, but the relative imbalance in responses we identify here is probably a function of the selected methodology. Of those who replied to our survey, almost 47% were aged over 50 and just 26% were 30 years or younger (see Figure 13. 1) The *Games Evaluation Report*, using data provided by VAL, argued that 31% of the entire team of Leicester volunteers was aged under 25 years. Of course, the *age* of a volunteer – combined with their ethnicity – is likely to have a considerable influence on how the Games are perceived and on the nature of the interaction experienced with athletes and family members. As a young Asian man in our survey relates, volunteering for the young is not only – or even predominantly – about work:

*I am 17, me and two of my friends decided to volunteer. The week ended up being just a week of messing around. Obviously, we had a job to do, but in the half-minutes after our individual parts [had ended], we ran about messing around with the athletes and having a laugh.*



**Figure 12.1: Volunteers by age**

12.17 From our sample of 79 SO volunteer respondents, 25 (31.6%) described themselves as ‘experienced’ volunteers and 34 (43%) said they had at least ‘a little’ experience of volunteering. This suggests that at least among the older volunteers for Special Olympics, many – nearly 75% by our estimate – had previous experiencing of volunteering. Around one-quarter of all the volunteers in our sample (25.3%) had never formally volunteered before. Allowing for the older sample we seem to have here, we would suggest that perhaps between 30-40% of the Leicester volunteers were probably entirely new to the volunteering business, thus suggesting a rather nice balance of experience and ‘freshness’ in the Leicester Orange Army. This might be one of the core reasons for the perceived success of the Leicester volunteers, who did seem to combine good sense and leadership with a sense of fun and a willingness to ‘get stuck in’ and innovate, when it was required. As most of our sample had previous volunteering experience, they also had something with which to compare working at the Special Olympics National Games. It was also revealing that only 23 (29%) of our respondents claimed to have no experience at all of working with people who have learning disabilities; almost one-in-five (19%) claimed to have ‘a lot’ of experience in this area (Figure 12.2). Again, age is likely to be an important factor here, but these data may also suggest that volunteers are not typically the overwhelmingly ‘green’ group of willing, but inexperienced, helpers they are sometimes

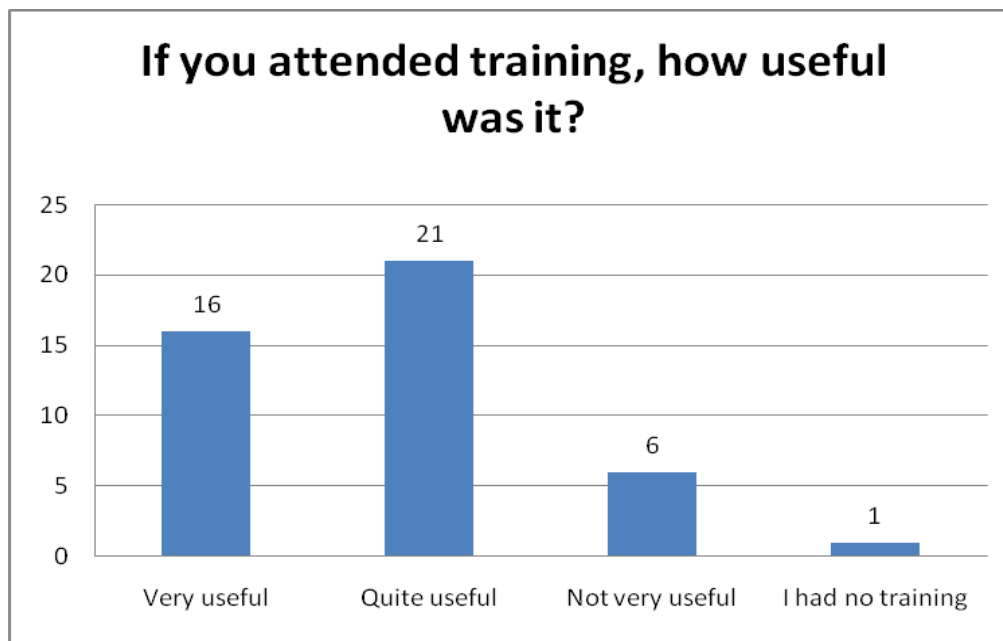
depicted. Recruiting volunteers also often means dipping into a pool of already committed voluntary and paid workers – in this case in the field of learning disability. Again, this combination of directed experience and relative unfamiliarity probably worked very well at Special Olympics, particularly for those younger, less experienced volunteers who may well have had some initial anxieties about exactly how best to interact with people with disabilities.



**Figure 12.2: Volunteers by experience with learning disability**

12.18 Learning disability awareness training was offered by VAL, at least to those volunteers who had their Games appointment confirmed long enough in advance to be able to take part. Hold ups with CRB checks and other issues meant that some volunteers were not able to access these opportunities. Forty-four volunteers in the Legacy sample (56.4% of those who answered this question) attended one of these modular training events which were typically held on Saturday mornings. The training programme ran from the last weekend in May until the second weekend in July. It was modular in concept with something in each session about the background of Special Olympics and about learning disability in general.<sup>128</sup> This was followed by topic themes related to the functional areas of the Games in Leicester. Volunteers were asked

to cover the sessions which dealt with the area of work to which they had been allocated. Not every volunteer had been allocated a role before the training took place, so for some of them there was no venue or sport specific training.<sup>129</sup> Of those that did undertake training in learning disability awareness, 16 (out of 44, or 36.4%) claimed it was 'very useful' and eight-out-of-ten people who had attended training said that they thought it was at least of some use (See Figure 12.3).

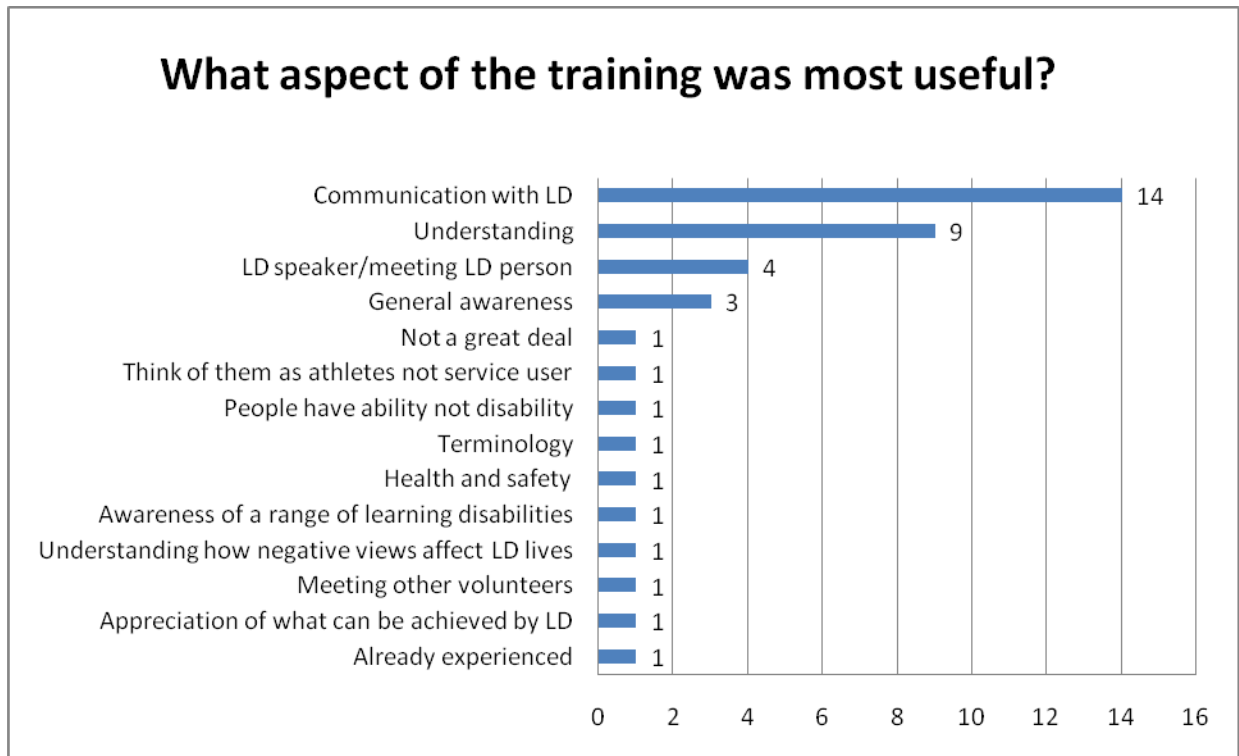


**Figure 12.3: Volunteers by learning disability awareness training (n=44)**

12.19 Another 16 (34.6%) of those who did learning disability (LD) awareness attend training also said they felt that they needed further or different training to what had been offered. These people typically identified knowledge and information specific to their volunteer roles at particular sporting events as an area in which they would have found more training useful. In the words of one respondent, a white volunteer in his 40s:

*My role was Event Manager for cycling. Some event specific sport cycling training or a pre-event (one-day) dry-run would have been very useful. We should have organised an East Midlands-specific regional event in the months prior to the main event to have a practice. This was suggested by the Technical Advisor, but I had not the time or resources available to do this.*





**Figure 12.4: Volunteers by most useful aspect of training (n=44)**

12.20 The volunteers were also asked what the most *useful* aspect of the training was for them. We have aggregated their responses in Figure 12.4. By far the most popular response here was in relation to the awareness training on how to communicate effectively with a person with a learning disability. Some of the respondents repeated in their survey responses what they had learned here; for example, the importance of always speaking slowly and clearly to athletes, so showing that they had engaged with this aspect of the training and had absorbed relevant information which they had then, presumably, put to good use. Closely related to this idea – and also a popular choice here – was the dimensions of the training which helped potential volunteers learn to understand more about the condition of athletes with learning disabilities and thus to develop a greater awareness of their needs and appropriate ways of engaging with them.

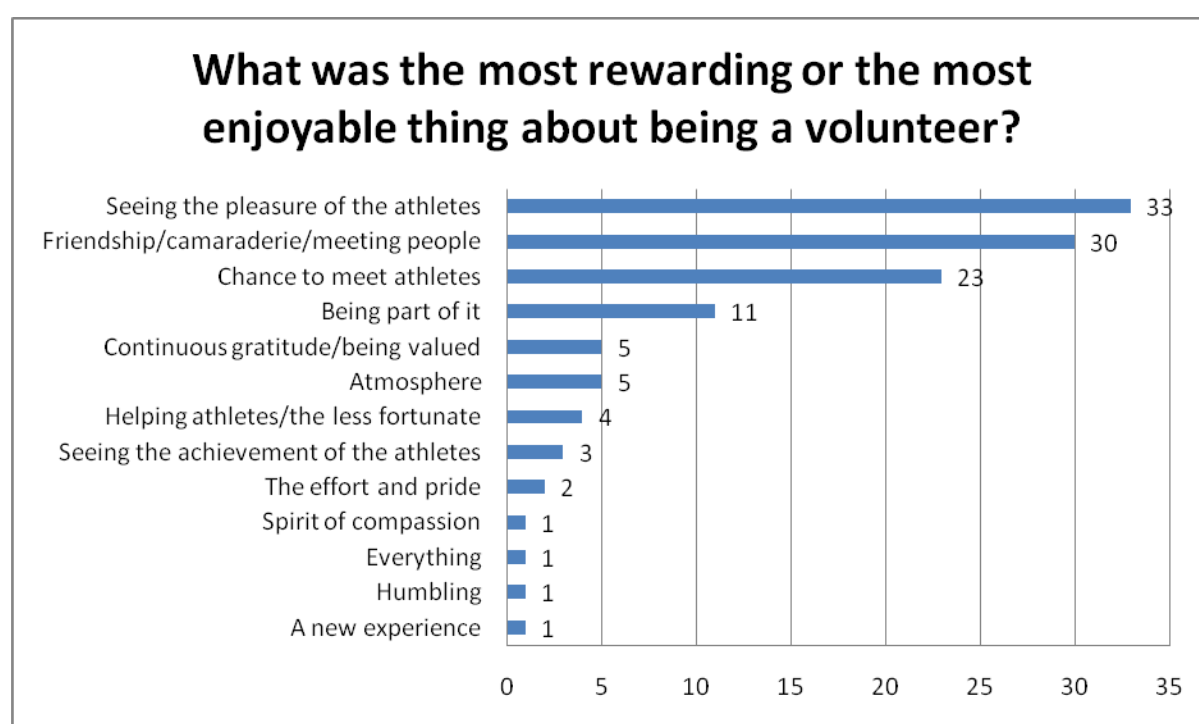
12.21 For some other respondents the opportunity to actually meet a person with a learning disability, someone who was part of the team delivering the training, was reassuring, instructive and revealing. A black female volunteer in her 30s found especially helpful, ‘The talk which the gentleman [with a learning disability] made, speaking about how life is for himself; getting help from others and coping each day.’ It helped to combat popular stereotypes, as this experienced white, male volunteer in his 60s confirmed:

*It was just a really nice course I would recommend to anyone, not just those who will have direct contact with learning disability. Most useful was the challenging of stereotypes and preconceptions and focusing on similarities and common ground. However fair and open you are it is necessary to challenge yourself and fight against drips of misinformation from the media, upbringing and life experience.*

12.22 A younger, inexperienced, female volunteer welcomed the practicality of the training, and especially that it involved, ‘Being taught how perceptions of objects and situations can differ, and what to do for effective communication in a practical way.’ An Asian male volunteer in his 50s agreed. He claimed that the training meant that he felt he was better prepared for resolving emerging problems because he had learned much more about: ‘How to treat people with learning disabilities. Be focused, don’t assume they cannot do anything, and not to ignore them. Get someone’s help if you need to.’ But not everyone shared this view, especially volunteers with no prior experience of working with people with learning disabilities. A young white male volunteer, for example, wanted, ‘More practical, hands-on, training rather than being spoken to in a classroom environment.’ And a younger female volunteer doubted the value of such training at all, arguing that: ‘It is very difficult to provide training for this kind of event due to the diversity of skills and personalities of the volunteers.’

12.23 Just over half – 56% – of all those in our Legacy sample had taken part in the pre-Games training offered at VAL. This was rather below the 70% figure quoted in the *Games Evaluation Report*.<sup>130</sup> However, our sample of volunteers was probably older on average than the entire volunteer group, and we also had a large proportion of respondents who had prior experience

of working with people with learning disabilities. At least some of these probably reasoned they did not need extra training. When asked how they would describe their overall *experience* of volunteering for Special Olympics in Leicester, like the VAL survey, respondents in the Legacy survey were almost universally positive. A total of 70 respondents (89%) described it as a ‘great experience’ and agreed that they were likely to volunteer again as a result. In the VAL survey conducted immediately after the Games the figure was 93%. No respondents at all reported that they had had a difficult or negative experience at the Games, something which might deter them from future volunteering.



**Figure 12.5: Volunteers by enjoyable things about being a Games Volunteer**

12.24 We then asked volunteers for more qualitative information about what were the *most and the least enjoyable things* about their experiences at Special Olympics. Again, we have aggregated these responses in Figures 12.5 and 12.6. The most enjoyable or rewarding aspects of being a volunteer, according to the Legacy sample, were pretty much all related to what we might describe as inter-personal or ‘friendship’ experiences. Respondents were not prompted

and were free to write anything they chose to for this question: they did not select an option from a prepared list. Three areas for answers far outnumbered any other response.

12.25 By far the most enjoyable and rewarding element mentioned by volunteers (41.7%) was witnessing the sheer competitive expressive pleasure of the athletes taking part. Typical here were comments such as: 'Seeing the joy on the athletes' faces' or that watching competing athletes was an, 'uplifting and inspiring experience'. Similar sentiments were unearthed in the analysis of the survey findings carried out for VAL.<sup>131</sup> Thirty respondents (38%) said that they most enjoyed the camaraderie and friendship generated at the Games, while 23 (29%) especially valued the chance to meet and get to know the athletes. The feedback for VAL similarly recorded that, 'the athletes made it a special, wonderful and friendly environment to work in'.<sup>132</sup> Simply being part of an event which generated such positive feeling among athletes, volunteers and spectators was highlighted by 11 people (13.9%). Respondents were able to give more than one answer to the question. A local female volunteer summed up well, in interview, the small frustrations but also the hugely enthusiastic feelings which many volunteers expressed about being part of the event.

*It's fabulous fun and I just love volunteering anyway. Things could have been sorted out earlier to help volunteers do more publicizing and give them more of a sense of 'ownership' of the Games. But I'm really enjoying it because I get to speak to athletes and their families. It is humbling that the families are here as they have to pay so much. This event is something completely different; it is not the usual kind of volunteering at all.*

12.26 Other strong 'positives' referred to by a number of volunteers included the 'general atmosphere' at the Games and the openly expressed gratitude from the athletes and their families for the assistance and support they received from volunteers. It was clear that many volunteers struck up strong emotional ties with the athletes and family members. For example, a female Asian volunteer, working at the boccia competition, describes below just one of the ways in which the athletes expressed their gratitude to the Orange Army:

*At Shree Prajapati Association Leicester, where I was volunteering, all the volunteers would line up at the entrance every morning and we would have loud welcoming music*

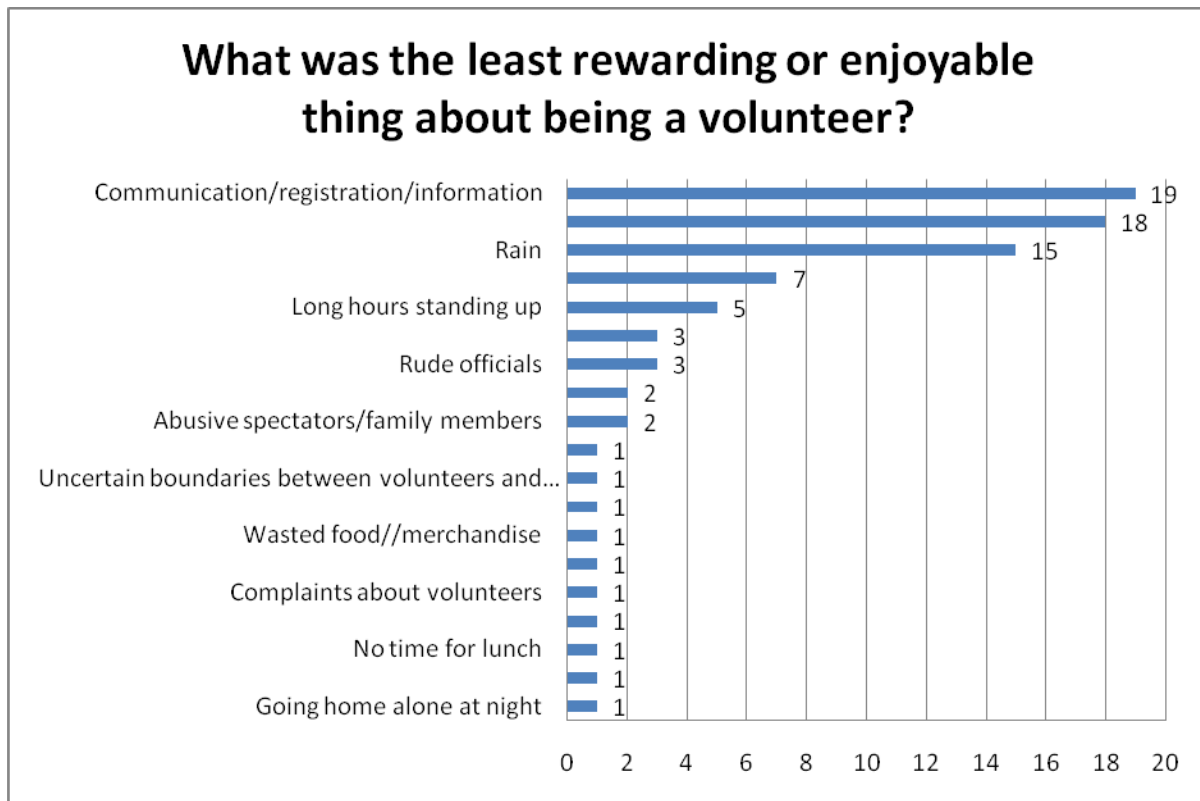
*playing, and clap and wave as the athletes walked in every day, and they in turn would shake our hands and wave, etc. It was brilliant to see the bright smiles on their faces. The participants, the coaches and their families were fantastic! And on the last day, one of the team coaches arranged with all participants to line up and make all the volunteers walk through the line-up with them clapping and cheering all the volunteers, to say thanks ... I, and many others, sobbed all the way through the line ... It was such an emotional experience!*

12.27 A number of Leicester volunteers referred to the positive, collective satisfaction of 'being involved in something'; a major undertaking – a 'big' event – but also of being successfully integrated into a group that was working well together, even though it was differentiated by both ethnicity and age. Especially rewarding here was:

*Working as a team with all ages in the voluntary sector. Our team leader Val [Kindred], at the netball, was committed to us feeling valued and developing as a team. As a result, the bonding between the young and the old was very successful. (White female, in her 50s)*

*Being part of something big and seeing the athletes and families enjoying themselves. (Asian Female, in her 20s)*

*Being part of something bringing such obvious joy and happiness to a group of people who struggle to do things I take for granted. The gratitude expressed by participants was far greater than anything I have experienced in able-bodied sport. (White Male, in his 50s)*



**Figure 12.6: Volunteers by least enjoyable things about being a Games Volunteer**

12.28 However, not all the volunteers in the survey were entirely positive about the Games experience. For example, 19 (24%) of highlighted frustration with problems of communications, lack of information and the registration process (Figure 13.8). One volunteer described the relatively helpless feeling of being quite unprepared to deal with what he had to face at the Games. He suggested this was due to a basic lack of background information about learning disability and the tensions and needs among both athletes and carers. For this clearly conscientious male volunteer, the least rewarding thing about the Games was:

*My own lack of preparation time and limited understanding of what the event structure and practicality of staging a special needs sporting event involved. I found this physically and emotionally exhausting on top of the day-job and the added culture of stress amongst some coaches, carers and family-members (who with often good reason and little reward carry a whole backpack of unfamiliar habit, expectation and coping strategies) that the volunteers had to assimilate alongside delivering the basic event.*

12.29 Seven respondents to the Legacy survey (8.9%) reported that it was not enjoyable to have been left waiting around too much or that they simply had not had enough duties to keep them fully occupied. Clearly, a project on this scale will involve some 'downtime' for volunteers, and organizers are also likely to seek security in having more volunteers than they really need in case of contingencies. VVTM Gill Westwood also revealed that 'A lot of the volunteers who want to get involved were sent a preference sheet, asking which venue they would like to be at and what jobs they would like to do.'<sup>133</sup> But some older, more experienced, volunteers were clearly quite frustrated by this aspect of their Games week. What annoyed them especially here was:

*Although enjoyable, there were too many volunteers and not enough to do at our venue. We were able to take days off. (White, female in her 50s)*

*It was frustrating, volunteering, and being told to arrive for a certain time then waiting around for a long time without a job to do. (White male in his 50s)*

*Not knowing what I was supposed to do for the first three days and feeling as if I had taken a week of my holiday off work to be a volunteer and feeling it had been a waste of time. Once the Games started properly ... it was great ... [but] there were too many volunteers and not enough work for them to do, which led to a lot of frustration and boredom. (White, female in her 50s)*

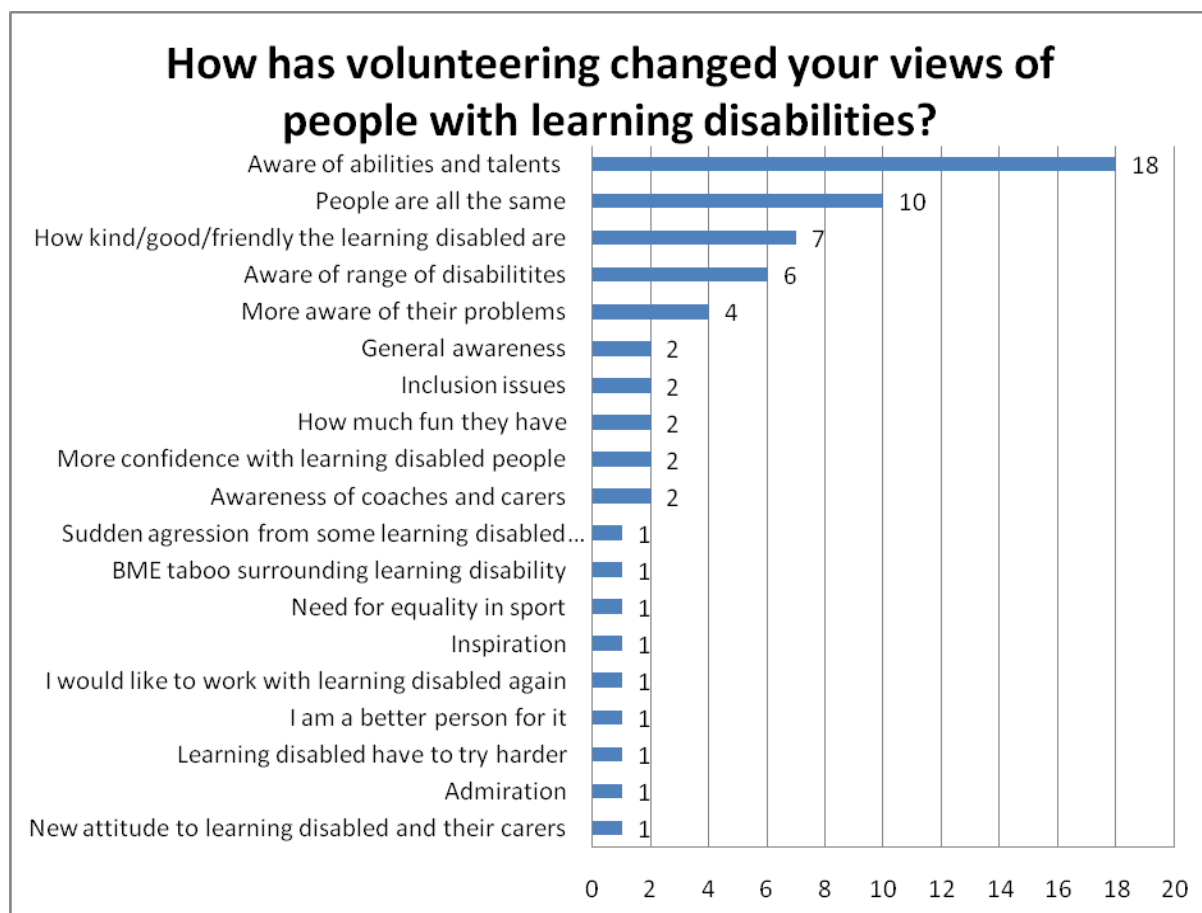
12.30 'Sometimes', complained a female volunteer in her 20s, 'the work was not shared equally between the volunteers – and people weren't sure of their volunteering role.' A further five respondents admitted that they had not enjoyed the long hours of work, which were very usually, for many volunteers spent standing up. Not surprisingly – but hardly within the control of the Games organizers – fifteen volunteers (19%) said that they had expressly not enjoyed the rain; some reported that being on car park duty in the inclement weather was the least rewarding aspect of the entire Games experience. There were a few complaints (five respondents) about 'rudeness' or even 'bullying' from officials and family members. One respondent felt uncomfortable about the 'uncertainty about the boundaries between the volunteers and officials.' This is a small number of complaints of this type and sporting competition can produce highly stressful situations, perhaps especially if the complexities of dealing with disability are

also thrown into the mix. Eighteen volunteers in the sample (22.8%) simply wrote 'None' in response to the question about the least enjoyable or least rewarding aspect. One respondent said, wistfully, that the very worst thing about the Games was that they had to finish.

12.31 We finished the Legacy volunteer survey by asking the sample if the experience of volunteering at the Special Olympics GB National Games had, in any way, changed their views about people with learning disabilities. Respondents were asked to indicate whether their views had been altered positively, negatively or if there had been 'no change'. In total, 52 respondents or two-thirds (65.8%) of the total sample said their view of people with learning disabilities had been changed positively. This figure also needs to be considered alongside the large proportion of the sample who had already some experience of working with people with learning disabilities. Fourteen respondents (17.7%), and mainly people with experience in this area, claimed to have experienced 'no change' in their views and they usually qualified this response by explaining that they already had what they considered to be a 'positive' opinion on this score, or else they knew people with learning disabilities well before the Games. No-one at all explicitly said that their views had changed negatively.

12.32 Being made 'more aware' of the abilities and talents of people with learning disabilities was the reason given by 18 volunteers (22.8%) for the 'positive' change in their views resulting from their work at the Games (Figure 12.7). Variations on the sentiment that, 'We are all people' was the rather quixotic next most popular positive realization expressed by 10 members (7.9%) of the sample. This was a slightly clumsy expression of a broadly integrationist sentiment which was more widely shared: that society was completed by being inclusive of a range of people with different talents and capabilities. Seven respondents (8.9%) were particularly impressed by how 'friendly' and 'warm' were the people with learning disabilities they had met in Leicester during Games Week and others had been made more aware of the wide range of difficulties and the very different learning disabilities that existed among the athletes.





**Figure 12.7: Volunteers by changed views of learning disability**

12.33 There were, of course, cases of people with little or no experience of learning disability who had had their views radically changed. A white female volunteer in her 60s confided: ‘You may be put off working with people with learning disabilities, but when you actually do it you are quick to realise that they are just ordinary people. It is a positive experience.’ Striking too were the comments of a young Asian Male volunteer who was determined that the athletes he had met – and who had changed his views so profoundly – were not disabled (a pejorative term) at all but instead had ‘difficulties.’

*I am at an age when I wasn't fully aware of people with learning DIFFICULTIES (not disabilities). To my shame I would say that before working with them I had no respect for them. However, now I have ... had some first-hand experience of how incredible some of them are I wouldn't say another bad word against anybody.*

12.34 A young, inexperienced black volunteer in her 20s was equally enthusiastic about the personal impact of working at the Games. Had this experience changed her views of people with learning disabilities?

*Absolutely! I once thought that these people with learning disabilities were not able to do most things, as I was not educated about them. But now I realise that there are different types of learning disabilities and people with such problems must be treated with respect and they deserve to be listened to.*

12.35 Volunteers who had disabilities themselves could also report on what they regarded as important outcomes of being involved in the Games, such as:

*I guess I'm more sensitive about learning disabilities now, but having epilepsy myself I have an idea of what life can be like for some athletes. This [experience] has made me feel stronger. **(Black, female in her 30s)***

*It's good to talk to people with learning difficulties (like me) and show people what we can do. **(White, male in his 50s)***

12.36 Finally, it was also clear from our responses that even people with considerable prior experience of working with people with learning disabilities had learned something – about themselves and others – from being involved in the Games because of its special mix of formal and informal contact with athletes, coaches and family members:

*I already had a positive view, but the SOL helped me understand the many different types of challenges that people with learning disabilities face. **(White, male, over 60 years of age)***

*I've always felt positively about people with learning disabilities. What changed for me was how much more confident and comfortable I felt communicating with them. **(White, female, in her 40s)***

12.37 One South Asian-origin volunteer – a woman in her 40s – noted that there were few black or minority ethnic athletes at the Games and she felt that perhaps learning disability remained something of a 'hidden secret' within some minority ethnic communities:

*The fact that there was no participant from the BME group (in boccia) has made me realise that learning disability is still a taboo subject within this group and I will be encouraging parents/guardians of people with learning difficulties within my community to learn from this event and try and take part in these kind of activities to make everyone feel included.*

12.38 Also on this theme of ‘race’ another experienced Leicester volunteer – a white woman in her 40s – reported on the perceived impact on some visitors of the unusual multicultural make-up of the Leicester-based ‘Orange Army’. There seemed at least some possibility from this account that lessons might even be *returned* to other local communities about how to promote more productive relationships across ethnic barriers. This volunteer had especially enjoyed:

*Helping to make it a great experience for athletes, families and delegations ... Seeing families enjoying a break and being in Leicester e.g. the family member who told me in a quite long conversation about the encounters held with people of different backgrounds (Asian) which were the most positive he had had – and significantly more than in his own home town.*

12.39 Only two respondents reported that their views had, partially at least, changed in a more ‘negative’ direction because of the Games. One respondent reported that they had become more aware of the ‘mood changes’ of some people with learning disabilities, something which could result in sudden bouts of aggression. Another noted how quite exhausted the carers often were and how much they depended on others to support them and their disabled family members. Here is some small evidence that volunteers were not idealising people with learning disability – though there are clearly cases of that happening here – and that some were actually having their awareness raised about the reality of everyday life for people with learning disabilities, and the challenges faced by their families and carers. Indeed, in many respects it was those volunteers who recognized the outstanding ‘ordinariness’ of the athletes that most impressed here: that one could casually ‘have a laugh’ with people at the Games and also identify exactly the mundane commonalities that existed between athletes, volunteers and Games officials. One volunteer valued:

*Building up rapport with athletes, coaches and families, knowing that I was having a laugh with the athletes and being part of memories that will last a*

*lifetime ... I saw athletes come out of their shell and blossom. (White, female in her 30s)*

Another observed, simply:

*They [the athletes] have their good days and their bad days, their ups and downs, their aspirations and expectations of life and a right to be treated with respect the same as anyone else. (White, female in her 50s)*

### *Summary*

12.40 Comparing the volunteer survey results with some of the aims of the volunteering programme for the 2009 Games, we can see that the programme was broadly successful in delivering one of its key objectives: developing a volunteer database that can be used to support future events and perhaps wider regeneration objectives. If, and how, these volunteers are used – and how many go on to be part of London 2012 remains to be seen. What we can say is that the experience of Special Olympics has probably made them more, not less likely to volunteer in the future. Another key objective, successfully met, was to recruit a group of volunteers that reflected something of the rich diversity of Leicester, and to a lesser extent Leicestershire and Rutland, to assist in delivering the Special Olympics GB National Games in 2009. This was one of the bases for promoting a successful, modern event and a high quality experience for athletes, their families and visitors – and for the volunteers. Its longer-term impact on the learning disability agenda in Britain remains to be seen, although the hosting of the Games by the city of Leicester and, via the volunteers, connecting with the multi-cultural face of modern British cities, must also surely produce changes in approaches to the ‘ethnicity issue’ for Special Olympics.

12.41 Although only 1,050 people of the people recruited by VAL were actually eventually involved in the Games, the corresponding publicity in the local media and the call for assistance reached a much larger number of potential volunteers. Through their enquiry and the response to it, even those people who did not end up as volunteers would have been likely to have had at least some raising of their awareness about learning disability and about Special Olympics. Certainly, a year after the Games, Kate Scott, School Sport Development Officer for Leicester-

shire and Rutland, and someone who was involved in the staging of the integrated National Youth Games in Loughborough in 2009 was of little doubt that volunteering around Special Olympics had had a major lasting impact in sports events in the region. She told us:

*Awareness of the Games and its athletes has obviously been raised and we are actively trying to work with the various Special Olympic groups around the County to link in our curriculum activities to community clubs ... I would suggest that one of the main impacts of the SO has been the volunteers. Since the games we have a much stronger adult volunteering structure and have benefitted from being able to utilise these volunteers at some of our other events, such as the Inclusive Youth Games.*<sup>134</sup>

12.42 Another volunteer objective was to ensure that people with learning disabilities could themselves access volunteering opportunities at Special Olympics. This objective was largely met and it was clear that involving people with disabilities in the *training* of volunteers had also had some impact on those who were planning to be involved in Special Olympics. This point about the importance of recruiting some disabled volunteers also registered among competitors, supporters and spectators at the Games, and it was reflected in some of our interview data from these sources. These comments were overwhelming positive concerning the role of volunteers at the Games. We provide just a small sample here of many more in the vein:

*I can't praise them enough; they are just outstanding. I noticed that a few [volunteers] had a learning disability. I don't remember any with learning disabilities in 2005. (Head coach of Southern team, equestrian events)*

*Really well done to the volunteers. (Equestrian venue)*

*I did notice some Asian volunteers – excellent. (Bowls spectator)*

*The team of helpers were very enthusiastic. (Netball spectator)*

*The volunteers are wonderful. (Swimming venue)*

*Volunteers are excellent; they answered any queries. (Family at swimming)*

*They have been brilliant; in fact, all the volunteers have been superb, especially at the family marquee. (Athlete mother and coach, swimming venue)*

*Volunteers have been fantastic. (Judo venue)*

*The volunteers have been great; they were even entertaining kids on track in the rain.*  
**(Athletics coach)**

12.43 One unexpected outcome of the volunteer programme for the 2009 Games was the formation of a City of Leicester Special Olympics group. A few of the volunteers from the Summer Games have remained in contact and they have been holding meetings to discuss plans to co-ordinate and raise funds for a team of learning disabled Leicester people to train towards competing in the next National Summer Games in 2013. Many other Special Olympics volunteers keep in contact through the social networking site Facebook. There are groups for Kayaking and for other volunteers that were set up by VVTMs and others as a way for the volunteer teams getting to know each other prior to working together at the Games. Some of these social networks continue to operate. There were also some small signs that volunteers were taking away important lessons from the 2009 Games and were involved in spreading the Special Olympics message. For example, Marjorie, a retired nurse with Leicester connections who had travelled from the north-west to volunteers for the Games at tennis was energized, as a result, to change things in her local area:

*I'm from the north-west of England – and I noticed that there were very few [athletes] from the north-west. I noticed, also, that a lot of the children that took part were from areas where the parents were very involved. And when I came back, I did actually go to 'One Voice' – which is a local community (organisation) in Lancaster – and asked if they had heard of the Special Olympics. Because it's only through ... they seem to have to have parents involved and be prepared to work hard on their behalf, if you know what I mean. But I think they got a lot out of it [Special Olympics]. Certainly the children that did well did.<sup>135</sup>*

12.44 Team Orange, the SOL volunteers for the National Summer Games of 2009, showed a commitment and enthusiasm above and beyond what was expected from their roles. Some of the usual teething troubles for volunteers were present here – the perceived lack of information for some; underemployment for others; occasional perceptions that their duties were sometimes dull and routine; the odd complaint about long hours and especially the vagaries of the weather – but these negatives were hugely opposed by the real rewards of

volunteering at the Games. Almost certainly their work in Leicester during one week of the summer of 2009 will have changed the lives of some of those involved and at the very least it will have challenged some popular perceptions of learning disability. And this is despite the, perhaps forgivable, periodic lapses among some volunteers into expressions about athletes and their families which risked depicting those involved as relatively passive and separate victims – ‘they’, ‘them’, etc. – who deserved more public sympathy for their ‘dignity’ and ‘bravery’.

12.45 We have tried to avoid in this section the bland, overused platitudes that characterize much discussion of volunteering and provide barriers to critical analysis.<sup>136</sup> We can also say that the volunteers, to use marketing and local authority speak, ‘added value’ to the Games. They did so in a number of ways: through their generally responsible and efficient work with the athletes and their families; but also in saving a financially troubled event some much needed money because of the way they took on duties which, in other contexts, would have required professional workers to delivery – and perhaps not as adequately or with such determination.<sup>137</sup> The 2009 Leicester Games would not have worked – or worked so successfully – without them.

### **13. ‘The joy of being picked’: the Special Olympics Families**

13.1 The Special Olympics Legacy project has as one of its focal points the more lasting effects of being involved in Special Olympics beyond the transient emotions of testing your own limits, running in a race or taking part in a sporting contest. What are the other outcomes for some of those connected to the event? Our interviews with people with learning disabilities and with members of their families show that for this group of people, making friendships and relationships can be difficult. Does Special Olympics have any role to play here? In 2001 the British Government introduced a new national strategy for the care and support of people with learning disabilities which became known as *Valuing People*.<sup>138</sup> The report introducing the

strategy pointed out that people with learning disabilities were amongst the most socially excluded and vulnerable groups in Britain. Only about one in six had jobs.<sup>139</sup> Few lived in their own homes and 52% had no real choice over who cared for them.<sup>140</sup> Many had few friends outside their families and those paid to look after them. The voices of people with learning disabilities were rarely heard in public. Despite the efforts of some highly committed staff, public services had failed to make consistent progress in overcoming the social exclusion of people with learning disabilities. Social isolation was identified as a problem for too many people with learning disabilities. A recent study had found that only 30% had a friend who was not either learning disabled as well, part of their family or paid to care for them.<sup>141</sup>

13.2 Four years after the launch of the initiative, a comprehensive survey of the lifestyles of 3,000 adults with learning disabilities in 2004 by Emerson *et al* (2005) showed that, despite the impact of *Valuing People*, for those with learning disabilities, social isolation remained a major feature of their lives.<sup>142</sup> The study found that 31% of people still said they had no contact with friends, 69% said most of their friends also had learning disabilities, 43% said they had been bullied and 19% of those living away from home said they 'never' saw their families. In short, no really discernable improvement was found on the situation observed at the start of the decade.<sup>143</sup>

13.3 This picture of relative isolation and some considerable difficulties in making meaningful social contacts for people with learning difficulties contrasts, rather sharply, with images from athletes and their families who came to the Leicester Special Olympics GB National Summer Games in July 2009. Here the social landscape constructed through sport appears more like a celebration and reinforcement of potentially lasting ties and significant friendship groups. Sport cannot change the whole picture of course. But the comments below are fairly typical of those drawn from our survey of family members of Special Olympic athletes from the Games in 2009:

*It [Special Olympics] helps those less fortunate get an opportunity to participate and make new friends, a fantastic concept.*



*His [son and Special Olympics athlete] week is structured around Special Olympics and he is part of a social network when many others could not include him.*

*The fun, companionship [and] support for each other, and pride and pleasure in achievement, is an experience some of them rarely get in their everyday lives.*

13.4 Of course, many of the new friendships described above were almost certainly made with fellow competitors, people who also had learning disabilities. But important connections are also established and exist here between athletes and coaches, assistants and volunteers, non-family supporters, spectators, and also fund raisers. Some of these can become significant and lasting for the athletes and others concerned. But crucially, too, the experience of Special Olympics also offers the *families* of people with learning disabilities opportunities for establishing friendships and for networking and sharing experiences. In part, our own research on families at the National Games in 2009 is about exploring the impact of the Games on them as participants, as well as on their friends and close relatives who were more directly involved in the Games as competitors.

#### *The families' survey*

13.5 We have already discussed the interview material we collected from family members and other visitors on site during the week of the Games. We want to add to this material here with data collected via an e-mail questionnaire which was sent to a sample of 400 selected families of athletes who competed at the Summer Games in 2009. The questionnaires were distributed proportionately to family members by region in order to try to reflect in our final sample the size of the different regions represented at the 2009 Games. We received detailed replies from representatives of 58 families attending the Games and these returns indeed covered 18 of the 19 Special Olympics GB regions. However, this response rate is low, at just 15%, so we cannot claim that we have a representative sample of Leicester Games families here. But the data generated are still useful in conjunction with our other interview data to help us to identify some common themes in the experiences of families drawn from across the Special Olympics regions to attend Leicester in July 2009.

13.6 The responses reveal that for 32 of these respondents (55%), this was the first time they had been to a SOGB National Summer Games. A further nine respondents (15.5%) had attended one Games previously and five (8.6%) had been to two Games. So our families' sample as a whole is relatively inexperienced in terms of its attendance patterns. However, we also had at least four families in our sample that were highly experienced, 'routine' Games attenders (seven or more attended) over a very long period. We suspect here they might have been including international events in their response. We certainly met family members at the Leicester Games who did, indeed, have a very long record of involvement in Special Olympics, often following athletes who had matured over a lengthy history as Games competitors, occasionally changing their events. To ascertain some evidence on the social class background of those who took part in the Games, respondents were asked to identify the occupation of the main wage earner in the household or their former occupation, if retired. From the information provided by 55 respondents we can say that 34 (62%) were from lower manual or semi-skilled and skilled working-class backgrounds and 21 (38%) were from non-manual and managerial and professional occupational backgrounds. This suggests that despite the not inconsiderable costs involved and indications of the relative lack of impact of Special Olympics in large urban areas, Special Olympics is not typically restricted to those in the higher social classes. Indeed our own observations and conversations during Games Week rather confirmed this view. Family members we spoke to were drawn from a range of social backgrounds and at least some of the sports on offer in the Games have very traditional working class roots, at least in the British context.



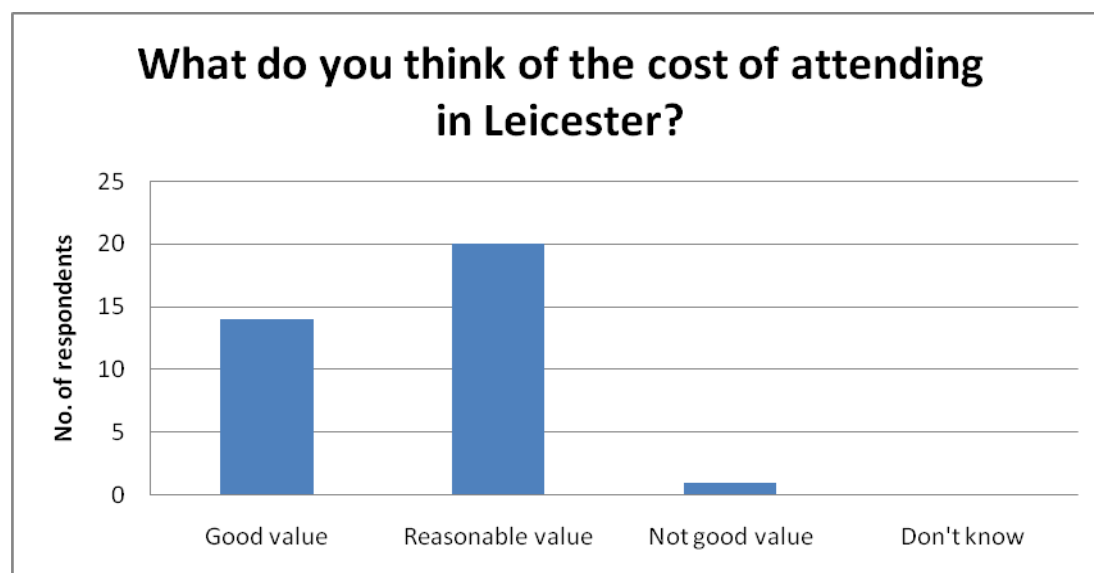
**Figure 13.1: How many family members/carers came to Leicester**

13.7 As can be seen from Figure 13.1, most families visited the Games in small family groups, with one-in-five (21%) in a party of just two people (including themselves) and a similar proportion, 22%, in a group of three. Some larger groups came to support athletes as we can see here, but in some cases these are likely to be ‘regional’ groupings in which a number of people travel together to support a number of different athletes, possibly even across events. This also gives some flavour of the typically highly *collective* experience of Special Olympics in which regional team members and even rivals and opponents might be offered support by larger groups of travelling family and friends. The larger supporter group sizes also indicate that support for athletes can – and often does – come from beyond the nuclear family. Our interviews at sporting venues during the week of competition confirmed that grandparents and aunts and uncles also came along to cheer on their competing relatives.<sup>144</sup> The *family* – rather than friends and acquaintances – is certainly the core unit of support for competitors at Special Olympics

13.8 We also asked families and carers how much they had spent on coming to Leicester and what they thought of the overall cost of attending the 2009 Leicester Games. Some of the families had their costs underwritten by their region, a situation which is obviously aimed at encouraging them to support the athletes and perhaps to help out at the Games as carers. We asked respondents to estimate the total costs of attending for their party and the *athlete* they were supporting – though it is clear from the responses to this question that the athlete costs for competing in the Games were probably excluded in most of these replies. Extrapolating from the data, the combined estimated spend of these 58 family groups was approximately £33,784, representing a mean spend of just over £582 per family group surveyed. Some locals covered by the survey spent very little of course, while those spending £1,000 or more tended to be in larger groups which had travelled some distance to attend the Games. Out of the 43 groups which offered an estimate of their expenditure (other than those whose costs were funded by their region), 20 (46.5%) said they had spent £1,000 or more on their trip and stay. (It should be noted that for our later analysis of the economic benefits to Leicester of Special Olympics we used data on spending which were collected on site, simply because it was easier to calculate using these materials, which tended to be tied to estimates of *individual*, rather than collective, spend).

13.9 Assessing the ‘value’ of an event is a strongly subjective exercise, of course. Who can easily put a ‘value’ on watching a relative or friend with a disability competing and experiencing the enjoyment, camaraderie and personal development that can be involved in sport? So not surprisingly, although some of these sums quoted here might seem quite large, we found very few people in our survey who expressed negative sentiments about the ‘value for money’ of their visit to Leicester (Figure 13.2). However, nor was their overwhelming praise concerning costs. Most respondents, of those who answered this question, agreed that value for money here was ‘reasonable’ (57%) rather than ‘good’ (40%). This was a surprise, although only one respondent felt completely short-changed in this respect. This suggests to us – especially perhaps considering the occupational class makeup of our family sample – that cost may have

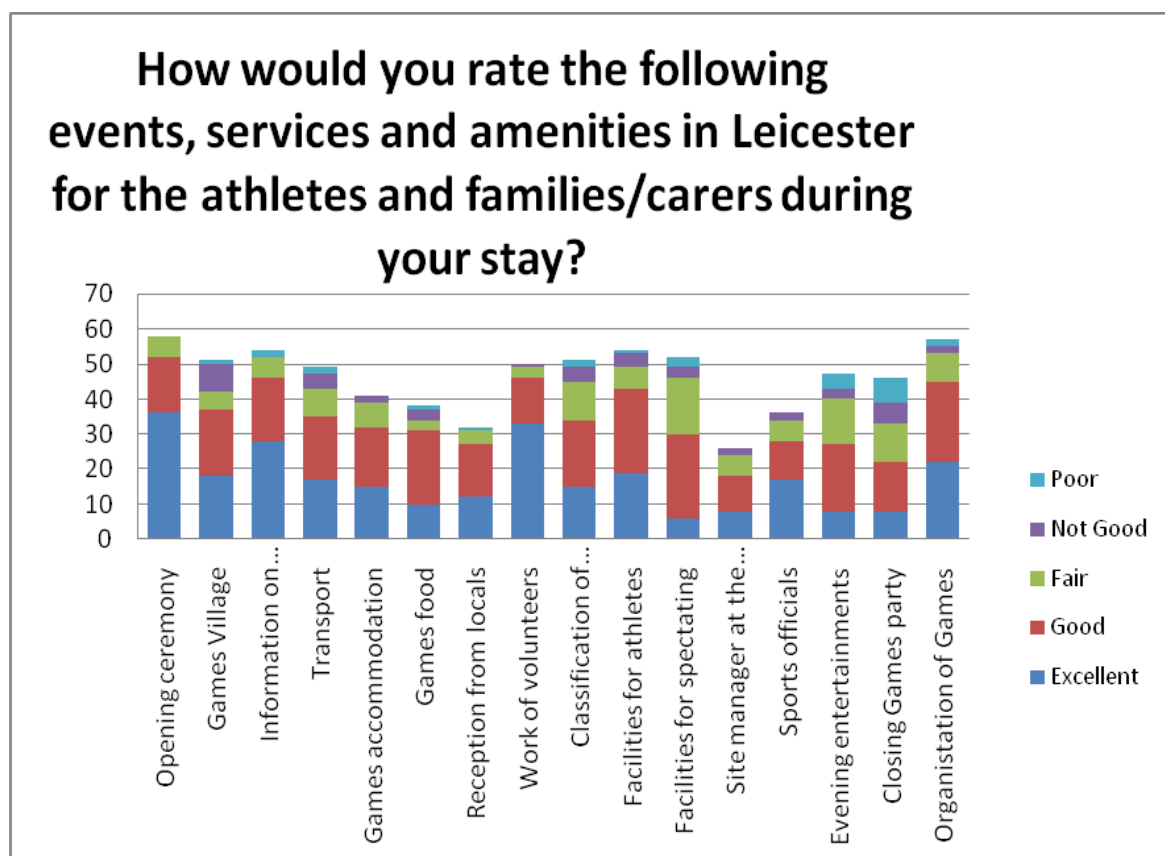
the potential to become a contentious question around the Summer Games, notwithstanding the generally positive sentiments expressed by people who travelled to the Games in 2009.



**Figure 13.2: Families views of the cost of attending in Leicester**

13.10 How did the families in our survey rate the different services and facilities on offer in Leicester? Respondents were asked to rate 16 aspects of the Leicester Games on a basic sliding scale from 'Excellent' to 'Poor'. The results are displayed in the chart below (Figure 13.3). For the families who responded two issues clearly stood out as very positive features of the 2009 Games: the *Opening Ceremony* held at the Walkers Stadium; and the work of the *Games' volunteers*. Nine-out-of-ten respondents rated the Opening Ceremony to be either 'excellent' or 'good' and eight-out-of-ten said the same for the contribution of the Orange Army of Games volunteers. The volunteers themselves had often commented on the 'rewards' involved in meeting family members so such exchanges were obviously seen positively on both sides. Also very highly rated was the general *organization* of the Games (78% approval rating) *facilities for athletes*, and the *information* provided to families about Leicester. Among those who commented on the *food* at the Games this was also highly rated and, despite the problems

reported on these scores, both *transport* for the Games and the *classification of athletes* also drew high approval ratings.



**Figure 13.3: Families by Leicester services and events**

13.11 According to the *SOL Games Evaluation Report*, ‘Families delighted in the warm and sincere welcome on offer from everyone they came into contact with’ throughout Games week. ‘Local customer service, including public bus drivers, taxi drivers, shop assistants, sports centre attendants, receptionists etc, were all very welcoming and helpful.’<sup>145</sup> This may be slightly overstating the case, but certainly the ‘reception from locals’ was rated very highly in our families’ survey. Some visitors described the locals as ‘really friendly’; and especially they, ‘liked the bus drivers – friendly as anything’.<sup>146</sup> Not all agreed – at least not entirely – but the general picture here is a fair reflection. The people of Leicester embraced those who came for the Games and this was largely recognized and reflected back by visitors to local providers and

retailers. Slightly less positively, the *evening entertainments* and especially the *Closing Games party* received rather more mixed reviews, as did the *facilities for spectators*. At least some of our respondents would have had experience of some of those events where it was difficult to accommodate spectators and so this more equivocal response is probably to be expected.

13.12 We asked our respondents how visiting the city for Special Olympics had affected their view of Leicester, if at all. Respondents were offered a set of fixed options here and according to these data, most visitors left with at least a fairly positive view of the city. Of the 35 people who answered this question – local and regional respondents probably self-excluded – nine (26%) were impressed enough to promise that they would ‘come back soon’. A further nine (26%) were ‘quite impressed’ and thought they ‘might return’. No visitor was expressly unimpressed with the city – at least no respondent was happy to say so – and we should remember that Leicester does not have a particularly strong national profile as either a popular day visitor venue or a noted tourist destination. This might explain why the largest category of respondents here judged Leicester to be ‘okay’ but probably not worth a quick return. Seen in this light, these general figures begin to take on quite a positive resonance in our view. Certainly few, if any, of those who came to the Games in 2009 had had any prejudices they may have arrived with about the city – popularly, a ‘good place to travel through en-route to somewhere else’ – either confirmed or even reinforced by their stay for the National Summer Games.

13.13 When we asked our respondents what they especially *enjoyed* about their visit to Leicester and the Games we returned to some very familiar themes, which are well established in this account of the Games: the volunteers; the grandeur and excitement of the Opening Ceremony; the ‘friendly’ local people and the welcome they offered; and the quality of the organisation of the Games (Figure 13.4). Other sources of enjoyment fell some way behind these leaders, though opportunities for meeting athletes and ‘old friends’ also showed a little prominence here. On 5 August 2009, Gary Owen from Milford Haven wrote to the Leicester Mercury to report his own experiences of Leicester. His daughter was taking part in the Games

gymnastics. ‘May I congratulate the people of Leicester on the recent Special Olympics GB’ he began. He continued:

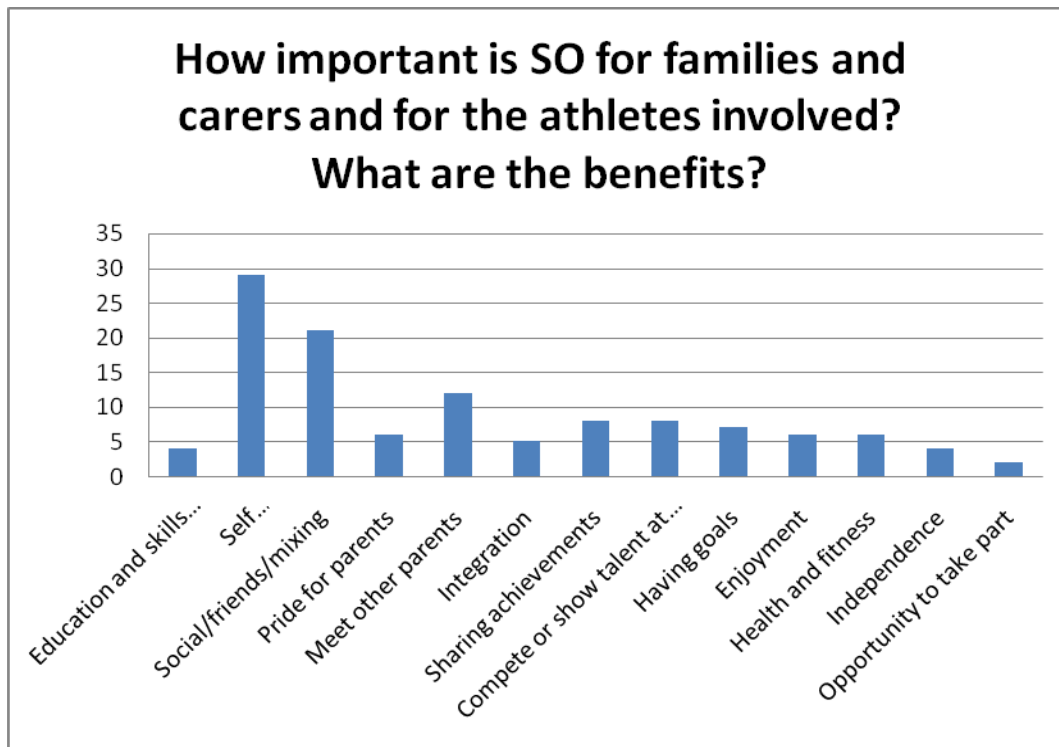
*My partner and I had the pleasure of staying in Leicester for the week ... We couldn’t believe how friendly everyone was. Hotel staff, event staff, the fabulous volunteers, taxi drivers, bus drivers were all brilliant! In the city centre all the shop staff were friendly and polite – unusual these days – and people were coming up to us in the street asking our daughter what she was competing in. What a great city!*



**Figure 13.4: Families by enjoyment of Leicester**

13.14 How important is Special Olympics for the families and carers, as well as for the athletes involved? What are the benefits, if any, of being involved in the National Summer Games, and also what are the drawbacks, if any? We asked our family respondents to write at some length, if they wished to do so, on these important issues. A brief summary of the themes of their responses is provided in Figure 13.5. Some people offered more than one benefit while others wrote nothing in the space provided.





**Figure 13.5: Families by importance and benefits of Special Olympics**

13.15 From a detailed coding analysis of the concepts and language used here we concluded that, overwhelmingly, the key benefit identified by our respondents applied directly to the athletes and it concerned the perceived improvement in their self-esteem, confidence, and/or personal pride as a result of competing in the Games and mixing for a short time with other athletes, officials and spectators. Views of this kind were mentioned by at least 29 (50%) of our survey respondents. In this vein, comments such as those reproduced below provide for useful summarising examples of these sorts of sentiments about the impact of the Games:

*[An] absolutely fantastic experience. Our youngsters enjoyed the competing, as well as the social aspect. It has really done their self-esteem good. They are very proud of their achievements.*

*I think it is very important for the self-esteem of the athletes involved, and it is a fantastic experience for them and their families. [It] gives them an opportunity to compete with others and makes them realise they are not alone in their problems.*

Another parent similarly argued that, 'The event itself is very important indeed; it gives the athletes a sense of purpose and of ... being.' Another argued that, less important than the competitive element of the Games was the generally supportive climate of the event:

*There was such a feeling of team spirit [that] there was no judgment on anybody. This is so important for athletes and families. It gives such confidence and pride to our young people and adults.*

13.16 Next in importance here, according to our Games' families, was the opportunity for athletes to make friends, mix with other people, and to freely socialize at the Games. This was identified by 21 respondents (36%). The Games seemed to be seen here as something of a positive and 'safe' space for athletes – as well as providing some welcome respite and collective support for their families. But then the focus turned more specifically to the benefits and opportunities for *families* which are provided by the national gathering at the Games. Especially important here was argued to be opportunities for having extended contact with people who shared similar circumstances and challenges to their own. Families of people with learning disabilities can often feel both isolated and vulnerable and Special Olympics can play an important role in their lives too. One respondent, for example, pointed to the importance for athletes of: 'competing against people of a similar ability,' but also that, '[Special Olympics] lets families know that they are not alone having a disabled child.'

13.17 In this sense, it was clear that it is important that simply being at the Games gives parents, as well as athletes, the chance to mix with other people who have similar life experiences, something which was identified as being valuable in creating potentially lasting supportive networks. It was also indicated from some of these comments that this sort of understanding and supportive general context was simply not available in the everyday lives of many carers and athletes. The chance for members of families and for athletes to *share* in achievements was also prominently mentioned here, as was having specified goals and a sense of purpose for the athletes. A smaller number of respondents highlighted the more general importance of the way the Games can raise the public profile of people with learning

disabilities. We might say that the evidence gathered from the family survey relating to issues of isolation and low esteem tends to be corroborated by other studies. In Canada, for example, the mothers of 46 adult Special Olympics athletes were studied by Jonathan Weiss.<sup>147</sup> He found that involvement in Special Olympics helped combat some of the problems many of these mothers experienced, such as role restriction, isolation, depression, lack of confidence about their own competence and issues relating to attachment. According to Weiss:

*Involvement in Special Olympics fully mediated the effect of child social maladjustment on maternal role restriction and depression and partially mediated its effect on maternal problems with competence. Taken together, these findings suggest that Special Olympics can function as a formal support for mothers.*<sup>148</sup>

13.18 As we can see from the above, for athletes involved in Special Olympics there are perceived benefits far beyond sport. These also include the promotion of independence and the skills development that participation can bring. Being an athlete involves a lot of personal organisation as well as commitment. Many adults with learning disabilities lack opportunities to develop self-reliance and Special Olympics can provide a motivation for independent organisation. For instance, one athlete interviewed for this research travels regularly to swimming training and to meetings of the East Midlands Special Olympics Regional Committee, of which he is a member. He goes alone on a network of buses, train and taxi into Leicester city centre from his rural home and out again to other villages. His story is typical of many Special Olympics athletes. A bowls player similarly told us of how he planned to catch two buses on his own to practice when his taxi was cancelled. For Special Olympics GB this sort of transferable skills development for athletes – at all levels – is an integrated and explicit component of the activities that the SO programme offers. For example, one regional Head of Delegation told us for this research that:

*We provide a holistic approach to our programme that looks at personal growth and development as well as leading a healthy lifestyle and developing individual sporting prowess. For example, athletes have come away from the Games having learnt how to drink from a straw and have developed hugely in self-esteem and confidence. They learn from the experience.*<sup>149</sup>

13.19 A mother in the survey described how her son had, through a love of Special Olympics football, taught himself enough *reading* skills to be able to get related information on his favourite sport. He had also learned through his involvement in sport about more nuanced forms of behaviour, such as how to follow rules, how to relate calmly and respectfully to others, and how to control his reactions to them. As she put it, her son, ‘has learnt how to cope with losing. He has had his self-esteem boosted by finding things he can do.’ For another mother, an important aspect of involvement in Special Olympics was that for her daughter, ‘social skills and interaction develop. They [athletes] are given the opportunity to shine and [are] encouraged to compete. Friendships are born. Physical skills - like balance - are also developed.’ Being in the Regional squad and staying away from home for a week also facilitates independence and can serve as an important rite of passage into adult life for young people with learning disabilities. As one respondent put it:

*This was probably one of the most important events in my son’s life to date! He had the joy of being picked (which increased his confidence), the experience of spending a week with other athletes, whose whole life centered around the sport he loves, the freedom to be a ‘man’ without his family, and the ultimate joy of earning a medal to show off to family and friends at home.*

13.20 Finally, we might point out that what the Legacy survey of families did not explore is what happens to those family members who do not attend SOGB events to support their athlete relative. For all the pleasures involved in sharing activities and triumphs with close relatives or friends who have a learning disability, it must also be acknowledged that for some of those members of families and for parents that do not travel to the National Games, it can be a welcome week of respite time, recharging the batteries and even a welcome chance to have a week’s holiday on their own.<sup>150</sup>

## **14. The Media Reaction to the 2009 Games**

14.1 This section is concerned with the media coverage of SOL 2009. It examines the coverage of Radio Leicester, the Leicester Mercury and the television broadcasts of BBC Midlands Today

and ITV Central Tonight. Why is this necessary? Firstly, it is perhaps important to remind the reader that many more people ‘experienced’ the 2009 National Summer Special Olympics Games through the media than those who actually attended in person. Secondly, the approach of the media can also reveal – as well as reinforce and shape – wider social attitudes regarding people with learning disabilities. In analyzing how the media have ‘presented’ the Special Olympics there are a number of factors to take into consideration. In particular, the rather ‘hybridised’ identity of Special Olympics GB Summer Games – part communal festival, part sporting competition – is important here. In a sporting context, the Special Olympics’ normative stress on participation and personal and collective goals, which often linked adult competitors with juniors, provides a sharp contrast with the usual sporting age segregation and the routine pursuit of records and excellence. This philosophy of the Special Olympics also contrasts with how the media generally present sport with its emphasis on winners and celebrities. To a certain extent, the media coverage of Special Olympics reflected these tensions, and it raises the question: was SOL 2009 a cultural ‘event’ or a sporting competition? Furthermore, because each broadcast media form, i.e. television, newspaper or radio, is also shaped by its own demands and audiences their coverage was often unsurprisingly different in both nature and tone.

14.2 Before looking in detail at the media coverage of the Games and media perceptions of people with learning disabilities, it will also be beneficial to put such coverage into some form of wider social context. Historically, people with learning disabilities have been largely excluded from public view. Earlier in the last century, for example, many of them had typically resided in institutions such as asylums; and then even when they were ‘released back into the community’ their public profile has been very low. Learning disability still carries great social stigma and this has been reflected in the relative ‘invisibility’ of this group in newspapers and on our television screens. Thus, media coverage of the Special Olympics Summer Games has offered an unusual opportunity for the wider public to be invited to form opinions of, and responses towards, people with a learning disability. We intend, therefore, to juxtapose the media coverage of SOL 2009 as a *sporting* event with the impact of its media coverage on wider public perceptions of

people with learning disabilities. Why is this important? Ryan and Thomas have argued that being in the presence of people with learning disabilities can be discomforting for the majority of the population:

*All of us ... have complex reactions when confronted by handicapped people. They arouse in us fears of our own possible abnormalities and dependencies. What if I were like that? How would I feel about myself? Would anyone like me?*<sup>151</sup>

14.3 It is possible that media reports and images of people with learning disabilities playing sport, for example, may challenge notions of 'socially acceptability' regarding this group, though this media presence may also make prejudices more overt. One of the aims of this section, therefore, is to try to analyse the extent to which public perceptions of people with disabilities have been reflected and reinforced – as well as changed – through media coverage. It has been argued that television (and the media generally) communicates meanings, values and beliefs.<sup>152</sup> What have been the meanings, values and beliefs of the media, therefore, towards people with learning disabilities? How can these be understood? One concept that has shaped much modern-day understandings of learning disability has been that of 'normalisation'. Normalisation is a philosophy that asserts that people with learning disabilities should have a right to the same, or similar, patterns of daily life that most people take for granted. However, normalisation has also been criticized because it has been argued to portray people with learning disabilities as inert victims of an oppressive system and that it represented a lifestyle valued by its proponents rather than by people with learning disabilities themselves; i.e. they were passive, rather than active, in this process.

14.4 Self-advocacy, on the other hand, has encouraged people to 'speak up' about their experiences not as 'cases' or 'victims' but as people in their own right. However, even this autobiographical approach is essentially a form of advocacy, which does not take into account the testimonies of others involved in offering daily support for people with learning disabilities – staff, supporters, families and administrators.<sup>153</sup> Let us now turn to look briefly at some of the media coverage of the 2009 Leicester Games.

### *Radio Coverage: Production*

14.5 BBC Radio Leicester's Games coverage was co-ordinated by John Sinclair, the station's regular football commentator. He was assisted by reporter Julie Mayer who went to a Special Olympics event every day. There was no prior contact with SOGB about approaches to the local radio coverage. The proposed coverage had however been discussed in advance with the station's management and was split into two areas: the Opening Ceremony, and coverage during the week of the Games via outside broadcasts. Throughout the week the station's SO reports were prefaced with a special jingle: '*Radio Leicester – your guide to the Games!*' The Games Opening Ceremony was given significant local radio coverage. For daily reports, Sinclair simply looked at the schedule of events and targeted those he wanted to see. Using the station radio car, Sinclair was present at nearly all the venues; Rutland Water (for yachting) was an exception due to logistical issues. He reported on events and interviewed 'live', both athletes and spectators around the different venues. He claimed that interviewees were chosen on the basis of whoever he 'bumped into, which is often the case.' This seems more than simply serendipity however: one interviewee included Gary Lineker when the BBC TV presenter was present at the football competition.

14.6 There was no single BBC local radio programme dedicated to the Games. Instead, there were reports throughout the day, with the first at 7.50am that included a summary of the previous day's results, a preview of that day's events, and interviews compiled by Sinclair. These reports lasted about a couple of minutes. Results were fed to the station via e-mail and the media at the Walkers Stadium. Listeners were also able to telephone-in to programmes and comment, live on air, with their views of Special Olympics in Leicester. One visiting female spectator told *Radio Leicester* listeners that her niece was involved in the basketball competition the caller was currently watching. When asked about the Opening Ceremony, she replied:

*Fantastic! Their faces! All cheering, dancing. This meant everything to them [the athletes]. The event made such a difference to her [the niece]. The build up has allowed her to make friends. It's the first time she's been away from home, so it's [being involved in the Games] independence building.*<sup>154</sup>

### *Radio Interviews with people with learning disabilities*

14.7 Regarding any necessary sensitivity in interviewing people with learning disabilities, John Sinclair commented that much of this involved a process of exploiting familiarity, on-site assessment and intuitively ‘feeling one’s way’:

*Normally you’d work with the coaches; we did a lot of interviews with coaches. The Lee Penfolds [local athlete and Games Ambassador] and so, you’re not going to struggle with because I knew them anyway. It was a question of when you arrived at the event finding out who [was] best to talk to; the tennis players were fine for instance. We didn’t try to shy away from doing it, but we obviously got advice, used it, for who to talk to.<sup>155</sup>*

14.8 Sinclair, because he was driving from event to event, was also in a good position to make some comment on the efficacy of the organization of the Games at ground level. He felt that the best thing about the Games was the ‘pure enjoyment’ of the people who took part. However, while describing it as a ‘fantastic event’ he questioned whether there was sufficient publicity locally about the Games. In addition, he also felt that it was difficult for the Leicester public to find some of the Games locations.

### *Newspaper coverage: background*

14.9 As we saw in Part 1 of the report, in the build-up to the Games the Leicester Mercury gave substantial, and generally supportive, coverage to the Special Olympics. Here we are especially concerned with its coverage of the athletes both before and during the week of competition and how it may (or may not) have shaped wider perceptions of people with learning disabilities. Since the 1990s, changes in local journalism have had implications for the content of the newspapers. In particular, circulation has dropped across the country, and the Leicester Mercury has been no different. In the 1990s, the Mercury’s circulation was around 100,000; by February 2010 it had fallen to 58,284. Franklin and Murphy have argued that one consequence of this downturn in sales has been that local newspapers have become ‘tabloid’ in both size and content, resulting in a decline in quality of local press coverage. Taking their lead from national newspapers, they argue that there was an increasing emphasis in the local press away from



hard news towards more 'entertainment'-based stories. Typographically, this process has involved the use of bigger headlines plus more and bigger pictures. In addition, there was a growing use of stories from public relations sources and freelance news agencies. According to Franklin and Murphy, 'The publications of shorter, brighter, 'frothier' stories and the increasing reliance on stories about entertainment, consumer items and "human interest" stories are the fallible hallmarks of the tabloid genre.'<sup>156</sup>

#### *Leicester Mercury Coverage: Games and Athletes*

14.10 The overall coverage in the Mercury of the Games and athletes was marked by what we might call a 'split focus' and mixed form of reporting. While it routinely incorporated coverage of the Games into its own sports pages, many SO stories were also included in the news section. In addition, different techniques were applied in reporting: on the one hand, there was the personal 'human interest' stories of athletes and their families and, (less frequently) on the other, the outstanding sporting performance of specific SO competitors.

#### *Pre-Games Coverage*

14.11 This section is based on a short analysis of the Mercury's '30 Days Countdown' series, which became a daily press feature in the lead-up to the Games. These stories were part of the Mercury's general news pages, rather than the sports section, with seven articles devoted to coverage of athlete preparations. Each was accompanied by a picture and a large headline. On Saturday 11 July 2009, for example, there was a two-page spread devoted to the Games in the 'Focus' section of the Mercury that featured four local SO athletes under the headline, 'We're Going For Gold.' Four, smiling photos of the athletes concerned, accompanied the piece. In general, the feature's narrative was that these were athletes who had overcome great odds even to compete in the Special Olympics, combined with a stress on the importance of sport in their lives today. In this sense, the key figures here were not represented as 'typical' athletes per se; instead, there was rather more of an emphasis on what we might describe as the 'human-interest' angle and the personalities of the athletes covered. As a consequence, some rather mixed messages are sent out by this generally supportive piece.

14.12 These types of newspaper ‘mini-biographies’ of SO athletes had a number of common elements. First, the medical conditions of the athletes were typically briefly outlined, as was the impact this has had on their lives. For example, it was explained that swimmer Christina Lewis had dyspraxia, which made everyday tasks, such as tying up your shoelaces, difficult, while Emily Smith not only suffered from Down’s syndrome but was also born with a heart defect. One particular aspect of such articles was to highlight how hard the athletes train and their deeply competitive streak. Zara Jurenko, it was stated, ‘Practices for an hour and a half most days and spends another hour in the gym’, while Christina Lewis was training ‘six times a week’. Furthermore, Zara regarded herself as the favourite for her event and she was reported as having recounted a story about a long match that she had played against her main rival, who she described as ‘really good’. Emily Smith stated simply: ‘I’m going to win gold.’

14.13 Sport as a vehicle for addressing wider problems in the lives of those involved in competition was also a routine feature of this sort of coverage. For example, for Zara Jurenko tennis was identified by the Mercury as an instrument for boosting personal skills – a ‘release’ from other difficulties, as well as a route into the world of minor ‘celebrity’:

*I used to get bullied at my old school ... which wasn't very nice, People weren't very nice. When I started tennis I used to pretend their [bullies] heads were the ball. Before ... I was really shy. I didn't talk to anyone else. I'm a lot more confident now. I enjoy meeting people and being on the TV, things like that.*

14.14 The parents of athletes were also widely quoted in order to emphasise to readers the wider participatory nature of the games – but also (perhaps inadvertently) serving to reinforce messages about the dependency of the athletes. For Rhys Milton’s father, for example, the Games were just about Rhys ‘taking part’ while Emily’s mother was reported to be worried that her daughter was perhaps setting ‘too high’ a target. The role of parents in the article is interesting. Firstly, it highlights how many young people participate in Special Olympics, but, secondly, it also gives another highly personalised angle; the pressures parents face in bringing up a child with a learning disability. Parents also featured strongly in Mercury stories about

table-tennis player Jeffrey Jarvis,<sup>157</sup> Games Ambassador and basketball Special Olympians Rachel Jarvis,<sup>158</sup> and Lee Penfold,<sup>159</sup> even though the athletes themselves were very experienced and were widely quoted in the stories. Another highly typical feature of stories of this kind was the kind of fund-raising which was required for athletes to continue in competition.<sup>160</sup>

### *Games Week Coverage*

14.15 A particularly good example of this 'mixed' style of reporting during the Games was the Mercury coverage of 29 July 2009, on the gymnastics and other Special Olympic events. A full page was devoted to Special Olympics stories in the *sports* pages of the paper and the main feature and pictures focused this time on two very young local female athletes, 10-year-old Elle Molyneux and 11-year-old Laura Sharp. But the core emphasis in this apparent sports story was *not* on their relative athletic performances, but rather on the general 'friendliness' and 'camaraderie' of the Games, the 'wonderful' support offered by the Games volunteers, and on the wider role of Special Olympics in building the children's confidence and self esteem. Parents – notably *mothers* – were widely quoted in the article on the 'vulnerability' of their children at home and in public streets and on how, by way of contrast, these young girls were able to 'flourish' in the much safer, more supportive context provided by Special Olympics Summer Games. 'The mums support their girls', continued the Mercury, 'with as much passion as they show when speaking about the event and its positive effects on their children.' A much smaller story on the same page, by contrast, concentrated much more directly on the *sporting* achievements of local teenager Patrick Cox, a gold medal winner in the table-tennis competition. The discussion here was very different from that of the gymnastics: it was about the intense preparation and competitive 'focus' of the athlete, the winning score, and also his 'dream' of going on to higher, representative sporting honours. It encapsulated, in fact, many of the usual conventions of press coverage of competitive sport. Indeed, without the added context of Special Olympics, the reader would be hard pressed to identify this piece as one dealing with athletes with disabilities at all.

*Some reflections on press coverage*

14.16 Press coverage of both of the types identified above was important for promoting Special Olympics in Leicester and raising more general issues around questions of learning disability. They also, arguably, would have encouraged local readers to think about the uses, functions and values of sport a little differently than perhaps they had in the past. Of course, the severity of the disabilities involved and the relative capacities of the athletes concerned are probably important variables in the reporting of these cases. Age and gender may also have played a part in generating the very different styles of reporting in play here. But this mix of approaches to local reporting of the Games also nicely captures the unique scope and ambiguities of Special Olympics itself and some of the complexities involved in properly 'locating' the Games for media purposes, and in a way which maintains the sporting integrity of the athletes. The obvious tensions between questions about the health and well-being of those involved and their sporting achievements and aspirations dominated much of the local Games coverage.<sup>161</sup>

14.16 The particular 'special' character of Special Olympics, in this sense, also means that it is a long way – and will probably stay that way – from what some may see as the rather radical or sweeping recommendations concerning the routine media reporting of disability sport more generally. Some national sports journalists – for example Brian Moore in the *Daily Telegraph* – have recently argued that society's response to disabilities in sport is no less than a measure of our 'humanity and maturity' and that:

*Once the human-interest point has been made, all disabled athletes want or need is for their performance to be assessed and reported in the same way as their able-bodied counterparts. This means criticism when justified and not some variation of 'but they did well considering all they've been through' ... We need a shift in attitude to disability sport.*<sup>162</sup>

14.17 What is not in question here is the extent to which issues of sport and learning disability – especially for a period of about three months from June through to August 2009, with an intense period of coverage during Games week – was a routine feature of the news and feature coverage offered by the *Leicester Mercury*. The paper's concluding summary article on the

Games on 3 August 2009 found it difficult to resist cliché arguing, below a photograph of the celebrating East Midlands squad and echoing the words of Games director Steve Humphries, that this was ‘the week that sport rediscovered its soul’.<sup>163</sup> It was perhaps easier to agree that the week of Games activities had been a ‘wonderful journey’, though more contentious was the expressed view here that its hosting in Leicester in 2009 had exposed ‘the best kept secret in sport’ (We look below at the TV coverage of Special Olympics). In many ways, it was the quoted comments of the chief executive of Leicester Tigers, Peter Wheeler, which nicely summed up some of the understandable difficulties the local press had had in coming up with the appropriate language and approach to reporting locally on Special Olympics. Wheeler, almost in one breath, managed to convey both a professional’s slight condescension, but also an obvious respect for the athletes involved in the Games when he told the *Mercury* on 3 August:

*You can see the great joy and fun they get out of partaking in sport. The atmosphere and the enthusiasm is very infectious. They are people without inhibitions, just playing their sport, enjoying themselves and competing fiercely at times. They display exactly the characteristics and qualities that you need in professional sport. They have physical strength and mobility and I’ve seen some real pace and skill while I’ve been watching the basketball.*

#### *Television coverage: background*

14.18 During the week of the 2009 Games in Leicester there were 22 items of national TV coverage and 63 examples of regional TV coverage of Special Olympics athletes and events in Leicester. Cumulative viewing figures on such matters are often rather speculative and unhelpful, but it has been estimated that the Games week PR reached an aggregate of 97.5 million TV viewers nationwide, and also reached over 300 million people during the 12 months build-up period. This sort of audience reach produced an estimated media value, according to calculations in this domain, of some £980,000.<sup>164</sup> ITV1 had been contracted as the main media partner for Special Olympics and its coverage was evidence of a significant new commitment to the Summer Games; the contract was signed in March 2009. However, for once, the recession seems to have worked in SOL’s favour, in that because of job cuts at ITV there was less exclusivity insisted upon in the ITV contract and so the BBC would also be allowed to present some features on the Games.<sup>165</sup> It had been hoped, of course, that the negotiation of a Games

television deal might make it easier to attract commercial sponsorship, although this proved not to be the case in the end. Naming rights – i.e. tying the name of a sponsor directly to the concept ‘Olympics’ – is actually precluded by the arrangement between Special Olympics and the IOC. This means that the attractions for a sponsor of TV exposure via the Games are much more limited.

14.19 Despite these limitations, the media partnership established with ITV was a reasonably successful one. This relationship provided the ITV regional news network with a selection of essentially ‘personal interest’ stories in the shape of athlete case studies, and also a number of key promotional events to attend during the months leading up to the Games. The value of the ITV partnership was estimated to be worth some £400,000 and coverage via this route reached some 2.7 million people.<sup>166</sup> For Games week alone the value of media coverage was estimated at some £250,000, with the total value of the year-long campaign for TV coverage of SO 2009 estimated at over £1.6 million. The estimated ‘return on investment’ for the various news media involved was later described in terms of a ratio of 9:1.<sup>167</sup>

#### *Local Television Coverage*

14.20 During the Games, there was coverage of the Special Olympics on both of the local regional channels, BBC East Midlands TV, and ITV’s Central. The main coverage of SOL 2009 for both BBC and ITV was on the evening news shows: BBC East Midlands Today (6.30-7pm) and ITV Central Tonight (6-6.30pm). In addition to this, one of the hosts of the Games Opening Ceremony, Sameena Ali Khan, was also a regular presenter on ITV’s Central Tonight. For ITV its Games coverage equated to over 20% of its entire local news output in a Monday to Friday schedule; that is, more than one entire programme per week devoted to Special Olympics. BBC East Midlands TV also carried intermittent coverage on other news programmes throughout the week (see table below).<sup>168</sup> ITV Central Tonight attracts an average audience of 420,000 per night,<sup>169</sup> although in July this figure is likely to be smaller. Even a conservative estimate of around 300,000 viewers would give a total audience for Special Olympics features from Monday to Friday of some 1.5 million.

14.21 Regional news programmes attempt to project what media researchers have described as a ‘family-style’ presentation, one based largely on a magazine format, and mainly aimed at a family audience. Its overwhelming purpose is to ‘reassure’.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, it has to appeal to a strongly local audience. In terms of typical audience ‘address’, regional journalists model their output on a respectable mid-market newspaper. The form of local TV news programmes, therefore, places an emphasis on human interest stories that are conveyed through the ‘familiar friend’ image of the studio presenters plus the familiar and comfortable visual scenes from the audience’s region.<sup>171</sup> It has been argued that the BBC and ITV offer different images in reporting the news, which can affect content. The past self-image of Central Tonight has been described as one of straight, ‘report it as it is’ hard news, human interest stories, mixed with approachable, safe, friendly, ‘sexy’ presenters; all of this within an entertaining package. By contrast, the BBC adopts a more educational and informational approach.<sup>172</sup> In terms of output, sport is very important to regional television. In 1996 sport took up about one-fifth of total programme time, more than any other news item on local television.<sup>173</sup> For ITV, though, the 2009 National Summer Special Olympics Games was presented as a separate, stand alone news item, while on the BBC it was integrated into its sports news.

**Table 14.1: Special Olympics Local Television Coverage<sup>174</sup>**

Date	Programme	SOL 2009 Coverage
25 July	BBC East Midlands	23 secs
	ITV Central Tonight	2 mins 25 secs
26 July	BBC East Midlands	41 secs
	ITV Central Tonight	0
27 July	BBC East Midlands – 1.30pm	1 min 51 secs
	ITV Central Tonight – 6pm	10 mins 10 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 6.30pm	2 mins 58 secs
28 July	BBC East Midlands – 1.30pm	0
	ITV Central Tonight – 6.00pm	4 mins 50 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 6.30pm	36 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 10.30pm	35 secs
29 July	BBC East Midlands – 1.30pm	0

30 July	ITV Central Tonight – 6.00pm	4 mins 20 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 6.30pm	1 min 45 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 10.30pm	1 min 16 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 1.30pm	0
	ITV Central Tonight – 6.00pm	3 mins 23 secs
31 July	BBC East Midlands – 6.30pm	2 mins 3 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 10.30pm	0
	BBC East Midlands – 1.30pm	40 secs
	ITV Central Tonight – 6.00pm	11 mins 49 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 6.30pm	3 mins 29 secs
	BBC East Midlands – 10.30pm	28 secs

### *Production*

14.22 As the main media partner for Special Olympics 2009 ITV 1 devoted not inconsiderable resources to their broadcasting of the Games. ITV Central had previously covered a number of Special Olympics events. This had culminated in them sending two reporters to Shanghai to report from the SO World Games. Senior management had felt that this had made ‘compelling television’ and it provided the impetus for their SOL 2009 coverage.<sup>175</sup> For SOL 2009, ITV Central Tonight had a production team of seven working on the Games. This included Gareth Owen, the network’s Leicester-based correspondent, who was in the city for the entirety of the Games. The others were: one senior producer; one reporter; two camera operators; one satellite engineer and two production assistants.<sup>176</sup> As the anchorman, Owen was the face of the Games from Central Tonight’s perspective, and, therefore, his role in mediating the Games for the viewing public was important. He admitted that beforehand he knew very little of Special Olympics and that his knowledge of people with learning disabilities was ‘fairly limited’, although he had worked with them in the past, ‘so last summer was a new experience for me.’<sup>177</sup> He only became involved in discussions over the planning of the coverage a month before the games began. This had involved how much coverage would be given, the sort of coverage and the logistics of making sure that the team was able to provide material for every ITV region as well as Central.



14.23 The main BBC East Midlands reporter was Ross Fletcher who ran reports on four out of the five evenings. While the BBC's Games' reports were interspersed with the news from 'mainstream' sports, the Special Olympics was a stand-alone feature every evening on ITV. In addition, it is perhaps revealing that Gareth Owen was not the regular sports reporter on ITV (unlike Fletcher on the BBC) and this may have signaled a slightly different approach to the nature of ITV's coverage. ITV mixed its broadcasting locations for the Games, from venues/ events, e.g. Opening and Closing Ceremonies and the Games Village, to its own studio.<sup>178</sup> In addition, unlike the BBC, ITV broadcasts ran in association with the branding of the games i.e. reports and features on ITV were frequently prefaced with the SOL 2009 logo.

#### *Nature of Coverage*

14.24 It has been argued in relation to television and the 2009 Games that for the first time, Special Olympics had 'some pretty good coverage right across the UK'.<sup>179</sup> This enabled the Games to increase its national profile. In addition, the city of Leicester's national profile received a boost while also increasing the general public awareness in the East Midlands and other regions of people with learning disabilities. Ian Payne, a presenter from the Tyne-Tees area was in charge of the entire UK coverage. He outlined the initial aims of the coverage:

*We didn't really know what to expect. It has certainly surpassed any expectations that we might have had. We have sent hours and hours of material to thirteen ITV regions ... Everyone now knows a lot more about Leicester, they know a heck of a lot more about the Special Olympics, and hopefully they know a bit more too about learning disabilities because I think that is what we were trying to do this week; take these Games to a wider audience.*<sup>180</sup>

14.25 Just as important as the *amount* of coverage of the 2009 Games is its *content* and the issues that this might raise regarding perceptions of people with learning disabilities. While it can be argued that television coverage bestowed some cultural legitimacy on Special Olympics, it is uncertain how this can best be interpreted. To what extent, for example, does concentrating on the 'specialness' of the games reinforce stereotypes of people with learning disabilities and their exclusion from mainstream society? How did the coverage reflect wider arguments over social inclusion? How does the language used by television presenters shape

wider public perceptions? Are the images used from the Games giving a false impression of people with learning disabilities? What impact does associating celebrities with the Games have on the audience and its perceptions of learning disability? What was the approach of Central Tonight to the actual coverage? What 'narrative' did it attempt to construct? Gareth Owen explained:

*Central Tonight is a serious news programme, but one which aims to tell compelling human interest stories: stories of achievement and endeavour. In that respect coverage of the Special Olympics fitted perfectly into our programme. This was a major news event for the city of Leicester ... full of colour and great pictures. But it was also a genuinely emotional week with hundreds of individuals doing things that they might not have previously believed possible. So for us, it had all of the elements that we would look for in a news story.*<sup>181</sup>

14.26 The televising of sport itself brings different challenges compared to other programming, and in the case of Special Olympics arguably even more so. The notion of winning and losing is integral to sport with the emphasis usually on celebrating winners. However, in Special Olympics, although winning remains important, the emphasis is much more on participation. In this sense, Special Olympics has reflected an amateur tradition compared to the materialism of elite, professional sport that receives greater coverage. (In many ways, Special Olympics embodies the 1970s Sports Council slogan, 'Sport for All', more than any other sporting event). Sport is usually framed in the public mind by its television coverage. Extensive airtime is devoted to building up major events: singling out the key stars to watch out for, soliciting the advice of 'experts' as to what will happen and forging points of identification through sporting rivalries for example, which provide a means of winning and holding an audience.<sup>182</sup> In comparison to 'regular sports' coverage, because of the proliferation of Special Olympics' events and classifications it was difficult for the broadcasters to concentrate on particular events at the 2009 Games, although there was an attempt to focus on particular personalities. As a result – and not dissimilar to the approach of the *Leicester Mercury* – there was mixed reporting style and a split focus regarding the Games' television coverage.

*What was actually covered?*

14.27 Firstly, there was considerable coverage given to the Games Opening Ceremony (Saturday 25 July) at Leicester City FC's Walkers Stadium on Saturday and Sunday, both before and after it took place. (There was also quite extensive TV coverage of the Closing Party that took place in Leicester's Abbey Park). The former was given extra prominence and publicity due to the appearance at the Games of the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown and his wife Sarah. This was a considerable coup for Special Olympics and Brown was later interviewed for television where he extolled the event's benefits for people with learning disabilities and its national importance.<sup>183</sup> For some of those who had been involved in the previous year in a desperate scramble to raise the necessary funds to run the 2009 Games even at a basic level, this sort of enthusiastic public endorsement for Special Olympics – and from the very highest levels of government – might, perhaps, have induced just a little ambivalence. But this sort of association would also, almost certainly, have added to the national standing of Special Olympics. Presumably, too, the Prime Minister's PR advisors had deduced that coverage of the Browns at Special Olympics might have had some positive political spin-offs.

14.28 Nearly all of the twenty-one SO sports were covered on TV in one form or another. However, because of the nature of the Special Olympics as a sporting event, the coverage was different to the regular coverage of sport. Broadcasters strove hard to strike a balance between focusing on achievement – the default aim of sports reporting – and the ethos of Special Olympics, which placed as much emphasis on participation. It could be argued that, at times, the presenters found it rather difficult to strike this complex balance between wanting to place emphasis on the winners – as would happen for any sporting event – while at the same time extolling the wider virtues of participation and personal achievement.

14.29 Sporting celebrities and their association with Special Olympics were also featured in the TV coverage. These included Lawrie McMenemy, former manager of Southampton and current chairman of SOGB, rugby footballer Lewis Moody of Leicester Tigers (and, later, captain of England), and, in particular, ex-Leicester City man and current BBC football anchor Gary Lineker. Lineker's appearance at the Games was featured throughout the day on BBC East Midlands

news. At the Opening Ceremony a number of video messages were relayed on the big screen from celebrities that included the Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar and Sir Steven Redgrave, the GB Olympic rower. Redgrave had also been featured in *Leicester Mercury's* promotion of the Games.<sup>184</sup> The role of celebrities more generally in promoting media coverage is that they seem to give events a certain kudos and respectability as well as increase the public profile of events like the Special Olympics. In return, this sort of support for a 'good cause' can assist in improving the image of celebrities through their association with a worthy charity.

14.30 Coverage was not completely restricted to the sport and the athletes. In ITV's final report, for example, there was an attempt to put the Games into a wider social context. There was an interview and feature about the general media coverage, an item on the Games' volunteers and an interview with the Games Director, Steve Humphries. In particular, there was an interview with one volunteer, Chloe Long, grand-daughter of Lawrie McMenemy, chairman of SOGB. She also captured part of the Games' volunteering ethos:

*My granddad has been with it [SO] for quite a while now and he's involved in a lot of charity work but this is something he really feels quite passionate about. So he obviously tells us about it, asks us whether we want to get involved, and I really wanted to see what it is that he's so passionate about.*

### ***Mediating Special Olympics***

#### ***(a) Projection of Positive Images***

14.31 Throughout the TV coverage, there was a very strong sense that a consciously 'positive' image was deliberately being projected, in terms of the work of Leicester as host city, the concept and the actuality of the Games, and also in terms of people with learning disabilities more generally. This largely positive projection took a number of forms. Firstly, the language used by reporters and interviewees was an important part of projecting this positive image and this was characterized by the frequent use of superlatives for describing the Games and its athletes. During the BBC and ITV coverage analysed, for example, the word 'fantastic' was used 27 times by presenters, reporters and interviewees. Other examples include: 'amazing' – 14

times; 'proud' – 14; 'fun' – 14; 'special' (not in conjunction with Special Olympics) – 14; and 'brilliant' – 9. The use of this sort of hyperbolic language and, more importantly, its general tone was transferred into the general reporting of the Games. In particular, each report on ITV was usually prefaced with this upbeat message. The introductions below provide good examples:

*Gareth Owen: 'Well Bob, what an incredible couple of days here at Leicester, and its only just beginning. Just look, so many smiling faces here and for everyone here a really inspiring story of achievement.'*<sup>185</sup>

*Gareth Owen: 'Bob, I'm having a whale of a time. It really is fantastic. It's been amazing couple of days really since that opening ceremony.'*<sup>186</sup>

14.32 At times, there was also perhaps some understandable, embellishment of the quality of the performances and the competition involved. On one occasion, for example, the standard of the athletics at Saffron Lane was described by TV commentators as 'very high indeed' which, as an event that placed an emphasis on participation over excellence and in comparison even to higher-level club athletics, it wasn't. The TV script also occasionally descended into cliché and became dangerously close to patronising. For example:

*Gareth Owen: 'You're going to take it home for the West Midlands.'*<sup>187</sup>

*Gareth Owen: 'Just one more round of competition tomorrow and whether finishing first or last, the triumph has been in the competing.'*<sup>188</sup>

Attempts were also made in the coverage that implied that there were obvious benefits to be had simply by linking together sport and learning disability:

*Anchor: 'Now time to prove that sport can offer enormous rewards whatever your ability. We're taking you back to the SO.'*<sup>189</sup>

14.33 The presenters in the studios (the anchors) played an important role in legitimating this seamlessly positive image of the Games through the passing of supportive comment on Special Olympics in supposedly casual exchanges with reporters: For example, at the Closing Party, the ITV anchor, in linking up with the main reporter, Gareth Owen, remarked that:

*Anchor (Male): 'Yes, final day of the National Special Olympics Summer Games and Gareth it has been a truly amazing week hasn't it?'*

*G.O.: 'It really has Bob and it's been rounded off magnificently here.'*<sup>190</sup>

These sorts of on-screen conversations, it is argued, invite and engage the viewer to go along with the values of the programme while providing little detail about how these assumptions have been formed.<sup>191</sup>

#### *(b) Perceptions of People with Learning Disabilities*

14.34 How were the athletes portrayed by television and what consequences could this have for the public perception of people with learning disabilities? In the coverage, this took a number of (inter-related forms): general references to people with a learning disability; reports on athletes; interviews with athletes and images of athletes. There was frequent and consistent use in the TV coverage of the term 'learning disabilities' or 'learning disabled',<sup>192</sup> which is now regarded as the correct or most appropriate terminology. Initially, though, on the BBC, the term 'learning difficulties' was employed on its early broadcasts.<sup>193</sup> However, it can be argued that this constant reference to difference and 'disability' creates an area of tension that revolves around the idea of 'labeling'. If people with learning disabilities are to be regarded as 'normal' then, to a certain extent at least, routinely referring to athletes as 'them' or by defining competitors by their disability alone can perhaps give out contradictory signals and reinforce dominant ideas. In this sense, some of the television coverage reflected and compounded aspects of these tensions. At the opening ceremony, for example, the actor Talip Tahil was interviewed for TV, and he said:

*It's a very big event for them and absolute congratulations to them for their preparation and their hard work, and I hope they all have a good time and, really, they're all winners. They're all triumphant that they are participating, so I really wish them all the best.*<sup>194</sup>

14.35 Other TV interviewees at the opening ceremony made similar distinctions, for example:

*'They couldn't achieve anything better, I don't think.'*

*'They love it.'*

*'To them it's just fun. It's not winning it's the taking part in the competition and an experience for them; it's just fun. These kids are disabled and they just like taking part.'*

Nevertheless, there was a certain educative element to the TV coverage with regular references being made to the importance of the Games for people with learning disabilities. At the Opening Ceremony, for example, it was stated that:

*'The organizers are emphasizing the role that sport can have on self-confidence in a Games where every athlete is given a chance to shine.'*<sup>195</sup>

*'The day had begun much earlier with the arrival of nearly 3000 athletes, all of with some form of learning disability.'*<sup>196</sup>

14.36 Here was also frequent reference to what learning disabilities meant with specific reference to Special Olympics and to how people with disabilities were actively challenging previous barriers:

*'For many of these two-and-a-half thousand athletes, it's the biggest event of their lives. All of them have learning difficulties [sic], some can't read or write, others have autism like Lee Penfold from Hinckley and Leicestershire. Around a decade ago he wouldn't even leave the house. Now he's helped co-host the Opening Ceremony.'*<sup>197</sup>

*'Now, the 2009 Special Olympic Games got underway in Leicester this weekend and for seven days the city will play host to thousands of athletes with learning disabilities, such as autism and Down's Syndrome.'*<sup>198</sup>

14.37 The necessary explanation of the concept of Special Olympics was also extended to some of the events which are unique to the Games, especially the MATP.

*Presenter: 'All week we've been highlighting stories from the Special Olympic Games in Leicester. They are for athletes with learning disabilities. Today, we were at an event that you won't find anywhere else on the sporting calendar. Here's Ross [Fletcher] again.'*

*Ross Fletcher: Welcome to the MATP event, otherwise known as Motor Activity Training Programme. It's for athletes with severe learning disabilities, where the emphasis is not on competing but achieving your personal best.'*<sup>199</sup>

14.38 There was further awareness issues explored through coverage of athletes who had been featured in their preparation in the run-up to the Games, and this was later followed up during Games Week. Their training was also set against their medical problems. One of the featured athletes was Kellie Brabham from Leicester, who competed in the judo. It was explained that she had Lennox Gastaut syndrome, a form of epilepsy, and balance problems. Another athlete, badminton player, Alex Edmonds was described as autistic and had had numerous operations after he was born with no fingers.<sup>200</sup> However, this was pretty much the limit to TV discussion about learning disability as a medical condition. It could be argued that these particular features were reflective of the nature of local television news because, although set in a sports context, these medical issues were constructed strongly around the personal experiences of individuals.<sup>201</sup>

*(c) Interviews with athletes*

14.39 The Games TV coverage was generally accompanied with interviews of athletes, which perhaps was likely to have left the biggest impression on the viewing public. In general, athletes were presented in a positive light as articulate, mainly young, people. Owen stated that, regarding the interviewing of athletes, this approach fitted into Central TV's overall coverage, which was,

*to tell inspiring stories of achievement. While the event as a spectacle was important (especially for Central Tonight), we were more interested in hearing from the athletes telling their own stories. With this in mind we identified a number of competitors as 'profiled athletes' from the different regions and followed them from training and preparation at home, through to the opening ceremony, the day of competition and hopefully the medals podium.*<sup>202</sup>

14.40 In addition, there was an emphasis on interviewing athletes who were deemed to be 'characters' and who had outgoing personalities. This reflected how the media generally constructs its sports reports, although to what extent it gives a broader picture of people with learning disabilities is problematic. At the regatta held at Rutland Water, for example, two kayakers offered different perceptions. One, Brendon Richardson, gave a considered response to questions: 'I train three times a week and it's all thanks to my coach. I'm really proud of her.'



By contrast, his fellow competitor, Zachary Roberts, was much chirpier: 'I go the fastest and this one here goes chick baby, yeah.' One tennis player Tom Styles (from the East Midlands) was interviewed about a contest he had won. Firstly, he demonstrated how he won the match with an ace and then talked about his pre-match superstition about breakfast – about preferring a 'full English' to cereal.<sup>203</sup> A number of interviews were conducted 'live'. It should be pointed out that to what degree athletes made 'good' interviewees was largely dependent on the extent of their disability, and that this may well have been a factor in who was chosen for interview. Owen explained that ITV had no formalized policy on this, but that coaches, team leaders and chaperones were approached to ask who would be willing and 'able to talk to us'. Athletes were not approached directly. It was apparently a similar approach used at other sporting events.<sup>204</sup>

14.41 One footballer, Andrew Bull, a goalkeeper for West Midlands, was particularly articulate – better than many professionals. He was perfectly able to comprehend the idea of discrimination as well as projecting a powerful 'can do' attitude regarding people with learning disabilities. Asked about taking part in the Games he said:

*It's one of the best feelings of our lives. You're watching people in all abilities, playing football doing something that wouldn't be allowed usually, know what I mean, like? People discriminate people with disability. 'We've done this, we can do this.'*

*(d) Reinforcing dominant assumptions*

14.42 There is some evidence that at least some of the TV coverage of the 2009 Games bordered on the patronizing with respect to people with learning disabilities. It could be argued that this sort of coverage might reinforce dominant assumptions regarding this issue, although this approach was perhaps due to the difficulty for journalists in striking a balance between how to approach such interviews and the demands of reporting on sport. It seems unlikely that journalists would have had preparatory training on how to talk about people with learning disabilities. After an interview with Matthew, an equestrian rider, in which the athlete said 'We are the best', the ITV broadcaster echoed the claim with a knowing: 'Well done, well said, "We

are the best.” Well done.’ One exchange on ITV with a very young female athlete was conducted in a similar vein and was particularly banal:

*Gareth Owen: I’m joined by a few of the competitors. Here is Sophie, ‘You’ve come all the way from Sunderland haven’t you?’*

*Sophie: Yes*

*G.O.: How are you getting on? Having fun?*

*Sophie: Yes*

*G.O.: What’s your sport?*

*Sophie: Judo.*

*G.O.: And how have you’ve been getting on?*

*Sophie: Very well.*

*G.O.: In fact, what’s that around your neck there?*

*Sophie: It’s a silver medal*

*G.O.: A silver medal! Did you just win that today?*

*Sophie: Yes [she shows the medal]*

*G.O.: You must be very proud.*

*Sophie: Yes*

In this case, the nature of the interview was perhaps dictated as much by the athlete’s age as it was by her disability (Although some professional footballers have been similarly criticized for being just as monosyllabic in similar situations). Moreover, this situation further highlighted the unique nature of the Special Olympics, which not only encompasses a wide range of learning disabilities, but also a wide age range for athletes.

14.43 Perhaps the most emotive TV reporting of all was from the Motor Activity Training Programme (MATP) event covered by the BBC. It featured Laurie Taylor, a ten-pin bowler, from Leicester, and this example highlights particularly the media's use of personal interest stories.<sup>205</sup> It was explained that Laurie – shown in a wheelchair – had 'severe cerebral palsy. She can't walk or talk and finds eating very difficult but that wasn't going to stop her from picking up a medal in the ten-pin bowling.' It was further stated that 'Laurie lost her dad three years ago, so this was a moment her mum wasn't going to miss.' This was then accompanied by pictures of her tearful mother taking photographs of Laurie with her medal and later giving Laurie a kiss. Her mother (Ellen) added: 'I can't put it into words. I really can't put it into words. It's just amazing; so, so proud of her. I just can't believe it. It's incredible.' The reporter then linked this exchange with the idea of the Special Olympics; that they 'are unique'. After the report had finished, its poignancy was added to by the BBC studio presenters, who commented:

*Sports Presenter: 'Awwh. Well done to Laurie, she's got us all welling up in the studio.*

*Hasn't she, her and her mum?'*

*Anchor (Female): 'Yes, she certainly has.'*

*Anchor (Male): 'Could a mum be any prouder?'*

*Anchor (Female): 'No, not at all, and well deserved it was as well.'<sup>206</sup>*

The same report was featured on the late evening news and the presenter comment was also a poignant: 'Awwh'.

#### *(e) Use of Images*

14.44 In addition to all the above, the reports and speech coverage were complemented by images that also reflected the relentlessly positive message being relayed about the Games. This had begun at the Opening Ceremony, which contained many shots of happy athletes waving to the crowd, plus people in the crowd cheering and banging plastic sticks. ITV ended its Monday evening programme with pictures from the Opening Ceremony, accompanied pointedly with the song, 'The Universal' by Blur. In addition, throughout there were a number

of images relayed of athletes giving the thumbs-up sign, emphasizing that, above all else, the Games were 'fun'. ITV's Games coverage was concluded with a brief highlights package that ended that night's programme and attempted to 'capture' the week. It combined a number of facets. There were shots of the Opening Ceremony, the lighting of the flame as well as a clip of Gary Lineker in attendance at the games, and speaking. There were also actions shots of different sports plus clips of interviews with athletes using superlatives about the Games. For example: 'Being in the Special Olympics and winning gold, it just felt amazing.' And: 'Very, very special really; very proud'. For the entire item the Blur song 'The Universal', in which the chorus contains the emotive and uplifting lyrics, 'Yes, it really, really could happen,' was played over it. Finally, at the end the SOL 2009 logo included the message 'Congratulations from ITV Central Tonight'.

#### *Some conclusions*

14.45 There can be little doubt that the media coverage afforded to Special Olympics in 2009 increased public awareness of people with learning disabilities and of their involvement in sport. This awareness-raising was naturally greater in Leicester, due to the additional work of the local newspaper and radio station, but there was also considerable TV coverage at a regional level through BBC East Midlands and especially ITV's Central Tonight. Moreover, regional coverage was extended to a national level. The nature of the media coverage, though – the general approach and the discourses used – raises important questions about what perceptions were likely to be formed by viewers of people with learning disabilities. Perhaps surprisingly, this quite extended coverage of learning disabled sport produced no special guidance or training for journalists about how they might approach such events. Their response to this suggestion might legitimately be that they are professional journalists who planned to treat Special Olympics just 'Like any other sport', but we have also shown that this was certainly not the case in practice. SO athletes (and the event itself), were certainly presented in a favourable (if occasionally patronizing) light by television, through their participation in a national sporting event and reference to the positive impact that sport could, and has, played in

their lives. TV coverage also highlighted how Special Olympics athletes displayed many of the same hopes and emotions, when it came to sport, as did other athletes.

14.46 However, what seemed to be missing here – from all media coverage – was any more general ‘political’ context to this coverage, something that reflected the nature of local news reporting more generally. ‘Human interest’ and the brave battles of individual athletes and their families always trumped a possibly wider perspective in this sense. While there was frequent reference to the disability of athletes, the issue of learning disability and the wider ‘condition’ of the learning disabled was rarely, if at all, explicitly discussed in terms of its deeper social, economic and political implications, especially in relation to discrimination. Instead, much of this discussion was perhaps implied – albeit rather weakly. There was also very little reference (especially in the TV coverage) to the social and medical provision involving people with learning disabilities. Neither was there – perhaps surprisingly considering the role that they play in the Special Olympics – much mention on television of the role of families and/ or carers in the Games, or in the lives of athletes. This was in contrast to much local press coverage and it may have been part of a deliberate policy, of course, to project an image of competing athletes as independent, ‘normal’ people and, in that sense, making the subject as ‘apolitical’ as possible.

14.47 Finally, to what extent did this ostensibly supportive TV coverage of Special Olympics actually *challenge* wider perceptions about people with learning disabilities? How well did it establish the issue on the regional and national agenda? These are difficult questions to answer and to try to do so would require further research. However, from a personal perspective perhaps ITV’s Gareth Owen was best able to sum up elements of the impact of the media coverage of the Games. He argued:

*Yes, I feel that it did change my attitude. So much of what we see and hear about people with learning disabilities is focussed on what CAN’T be done, but for a week last year I saw what CAN be done, and it was real eye-opener.*<sup>207</sup>

## **PART III – THE GAMES AND LEGACY**

### **15. Estimates on the Local Financial Impact of the Games**

15.1 The evidence we have assembled and presented so far shows that the Special Olympics National Summer Games held in Leicester in July 2009 was, by most measures, a highly successful event. The Games had widespread public backing and some notable media coverage; it was generally efficiently run in difficult circumstances; and the athletes and their families were well managed and provided for and they had a productive and enjoyable stay in Leicester. Throughout this report we have offered evidence, observations and criticisms on various aspects of the SOL 2009 experience, both before and during the Games. The aim of this final section is to offer further reflections on some – not all – aspects of the legacy of SOL 2009. This section is also mainly intended to raise questions for future consideration for Games management and promotion rather than attempt to offer definitive answers to all the difficulties experienced in Leicester.

15.2 It should be stated at the outset that the whole notion of ‘legacy’ is not only desirable for any city investing in hosting an event of this kind, but it is also rather difficult to define and quantify: there is no convenient formula to measure legacy, and discussion of it almost inevitably produces the rejoinder, legacy for whom? Moreover, there is a real danger that too much is expected from sporting events in terms of legacy because of a general lack of hard reflection on the subject and also sport’s relatively immediate and ephemeral character. Finally, it is perhaps just too soon – we are writing in 2011 – to reach any firm conclusions about a lasting legacy for SOL 2009.

15.3 Despite all these difficulties, in order to put our current reflections into some sort of wider context it will be beneficial for us to try to define ‘legacy’, at least in some loose way. For

politicians, the media, policy makers and some academics, 'legacy' has become something of a buzzword in recent years. This is no more so than in sport, where major international bodies, such as FIFA and especially the IOC, have become increasingly concerned that what remains of the vast investment made by host nations in mega-events does not boil down to poorly used facilities and just a few fleeting memories. One signal of this is the seriousness placed by London's 2012 Olympics bid on its own imagined post-games legacy. Just as leading global sporting organizations are increasingly trying to offer shape to the legacy of their mega-events, so at the national or even the regional level the importance of legacy has become a preoccupation given the scale of investment now involved. This concern applied to SOL 2009, which – uniquely, for sport at this level – instigated a Legacy Group to report on the Games and their impact on the city, the Leicester public, SOGB and people with learning disabilities (see 3.15 to 3.18).

15.4 So what do we take 'legacy' to mean and how does it apply to SOL 2009? In a general sense, the term is clear and simple enough: it means what is passed on or inherited – whether economic, social, political, religious or, in this case, sporting – from one person to another and, by extension, from one organization to its successors. Arguably, as we have hinted above, sport has a particular difficulty with legacy which most other institutions do not. Sport in general, and especially high-level spectator sport, is best experienced as instant drama; something which is acted out in the theatre of the present. All that seems to matter in sporting competition is 'the moment' and that, in a nutshell, is the problem. Previously for sport, the question of what remains behind or what can be learned or passed on to others was not seen as an especially important issue. All that has changed: now, for good or ill, it seems that everything, and everyone, must have a legacy of some kind.

15.5 Legacies for sporting mega-events can have both positive and negative elements. 'Good' legacies can refer to urban, economic, social, human capital and political benefits that arise from the hosting of sporting events. By contrast, 'negative' legacies can cover areas such as debts from funding and construction; delays in venue delivery; unnecessary infrastructural

change; the temporary crowding out of visitors; loss of permanently returning tourists; an unintended increase in property prices; environmental damage; and even social displacement. There are also essentially two kinds of legacies: 'hard' and 'soft'. Whereas a hard legacy can be visible and tangible in the form, for example, of repeat new business for the city, or capital infrastructural developments, a soft legacy, such as creating skills or changing local attitudes may not be so apparent. It is obvious to all parties that SOL 2009 left no hard legacy in terms of the construction of new sports stadia in Leicester. In addition, there was no new major infrastructural investment to host the Games; the re-surfacing of the cycling venue in Abbey Park was the limit of work in this respect. Instead, the main legacies from SOL 2009 have been soft ones.

15.6 Soft legacy can include: increased local participation in sport; increased awareness of arts and culture; enhanced civic pride and self-esteem; skill acquisition; and increased environmental sustainability. For SOL 2009, there were a number of key soft legacies, which included 'capacity building'. This can involve the extent to which lessons from the training and recruitment of volunteers will be passed on to other events. In addition, there is also a soft legacy for the City Council regarding the extent to which the organizational skills that were developed in putting on this event can be re-deployed again. But perhaps most importantly there was the legacy of – and for – the Special Olympics athletes. This terrain can lead us to important questions such as: the extent to which Special Olympics contributes towards the social inclusion of people with learning disabilities more generally? And, what has been the impact of Special Olympics on forming perceptions in the Leicester public of people with learning disabilities? We return to some of these legacy issues in the final chapters, but here we want to focus initially on aspects of 'hard' legacy: some of the financial consequences of hosting the 2009 Games.

### *Games Finance*

15.7 The Special Olympics GB National Summer Games does not fit easily into the category of commercially attractive sporting mega-events. Special Olympics has no obvious paying public



for most of its activities, it has no guaranteed sponsors or media income, and it is an event which is likely to impact positively on a host city more in image and cultural terms rather than in easily measurable economic ways. We have looked elsewhere in this report at some of the potential positive branding outcomes for the city of hosting the 2009 Games. Nevertheless, one of the key considerations for any city in hosting a major sporting event has to be the more immediate local and regional financial leverage it can create. The cost of organising and delivering the event can then be offset by the additional income brought into the host city and its businesses by visiting athletes, spectators and support teams.

15.8 Taking all the above into account, Special Olympics GB National Summer Games is still likely to be a modest income generator, just like any other comparable medium-sized sporting event of this kind. The event brought people into Leicester who would not otherwise have been there and who were taking part in activities they would not normally undertake in the city. The inward spend generated by the event can thus be estimated to be 'new' income to the city. This new spend did not obviously involve displacement of income from one business or service in the city to another which is what happens if, for instance, local people choose to go to the cinema rather than to a local theatre, football match or restaurant.

15.9 Leicester City Council invested just under £1 million in hosting the Games in unanticipated expenditure, which was mainly the consequence of a combination of the economic downturn and a failure, in a difficult economic climate, to secure major sponsors for the 2009 Games. In fact, only £102,000 was raised from private sponsorship to support the Games: from Forbes Charitable Foundation, British Gas and the National Grid, respectively. This was less than 4% of the estimated total cost of hosting the 2009 Games. Sport England contributed another £200,000 and Leicestershire County Council £100,000. Excluding accommodation costs – broadly covered by income raised from competing athletes – and £251,000 estimated staff costs recharged by Leicester City Council to the Games Company, the published accounts of the 2009 Games show that they cost just over £2.8 million to host. Just over £1 million is included here as Games income in what are described as 'donated' services and facilities, including

£331,500 for what it would have cost in commercial terms to hire from Leicester City Council and others the facilities and the equipment used for the Games.<sup>208</sup> In short, it is clear that without public funding or a change in commercial sponsors' attitudes towards Special Olympics, maintaining the Games in its current format is likely to be a considerable challenge.

15.10 This current report has described elsewhere some of the important *non-monetary* impacts and legacies of the event, which represent what we might describe as 'added value' to the Council's financial investment. We have also described elsewhere in this report the estimated value of the considerable additional *media exposure* for the city as a result of hosting the 2009 Games. But there is also a monetary value to the event which can be measured as additional income to city's public and business sectors and we want to offer some estimates in this latter respect here. We should say that the calculations here are an extrapolation based on responses to small surveys, during and after the Games, involving visitors and family members who came to the city. Because of the limited scale of the sample the results are indicative rather than conclusive. It is also the case that no reliable trend data seems to have been collected locally which might help build into our calculations other comparative factors – weather, competing events, etc. – in determining the local economic impact of the Games.

*(i) Estimated athletes and coaches spend*

15.11 For the week of the Games, 25 to 31 July 2009, the city's population was swollen by a reported approximated figure of 11,000 additional visitors, people who were in the city to take part in or support the Special Olympics National Games. All these people brought at least some additional income to the city. Approximately 2,400 athletes from 19 regions came to Leicester to compete in the Games. The athletes from the North West Region were recommended to bring £60 spending money with them to Leicester.<sup>209</sup> This seems like a reasonable base from which to build our assumptions – though it is possible that some athletes exceeded this spend while others will have fallen short. But assuming that, roughly speaking, a similar amount was recommended for athletes' spending by the other Special Olympics GB regions, then approximately £144,000 was likely to have been brought into the city and surrounding areas

and was available to be spent there by athletes ( $2,400 \times £60 = £144,000$ ). Assuming that the 1,200 coaches who accompanied athletes would have counted on spending in the area at least a similar amount as the athletes – this may be a conservative estimate – thus results in another estimate of £72,000 ( $1200 \times £60$ ) of new income coming into Leicester and the surrounding area. Athletes, coaches and supporters were lodged mainly in accommodation provided by the University of Leicester, with some additional spaces also arranged with De Montfort University. The total cost of this accommodation to the 2,400 athletes and 1,200 coaches amounted to £1.35 million pounds, which was paid to the local universities.

#### *ii) Families and Supporters*

15.12 In addition to those taking part in the Games as athletes or coaches, around a reported 6,000 family members and friends of participants came to the city to give their support and to watch the various ceremonies and sports involved (this may be a slight over-estimate of the numbers who actually came). Most of these people came from outside Leicester and its surrounds. During the week of the Games, a sample of visiting spectators was asked by the researchers to complete a questionnaire in the Families' Marquee at the Games Village. They were asked about their expenditure on accommodation in Leicester and how much money they were likely to spend while in the city. These data have been combined with similar data on estimated spend collected from the post-Games families' survey which is discussed elsewhere in this report. This work created data on reported and anticipated spending at the 2009 Games which was drawn from a small sample of 250 people.

15.13 We have estimated that probably around one-in-six of the total number of visitors to the Games did not use local accommodation. This was either because they were already locally based in the East Midlands, or they stayed with friends, or camped or stayed in mobile homes or caravans or made other arrangements. Hotel prices reported by the family members surveyed who did pay to stay ranged from £30 to £90 a day (presumably for a double room). The mean spend was around £60 for a room. We cannot be sure, of course, that all families members stayed in the area for the entire period of the Games and nor, as we have said, can

we be sure that all families stayed in local hotels and guest houses – some may have lodged with friends in Leicester and the region. But many of the events for Special Olympics did continue across the whole week of sporting activity, the Special Olympic athletes themselves stayed for the whole week, and also many people who travelled as supporters wanted to remain with athletes in the area to enjoy the collective Closing Ceremony. Our impression from talking to family members was that the vast majority planned to stay in the area for more than a few days and probably the entire week. Taking all this into account, even on a conservative basis we have estimated that most visitors to the city probably stayed, on average, for at least four nights in Leicester and the surrounding area.

15.14 On the basis of these (admittedly considerable) assumptions, this would have meant that the amount spent on accommodation per respondent who was staying in or around the city in hotel and other accommodation for the Games was approximately £30 per night multiplied by an estimated average stay of 4 nights (a mid-point between a minimum of one and maximum of seven), giving a total visitor spend on accommodation per person of around £120 over the week of the event. This calculation is based on one room costing £60 shared by an average of two people, giving an approximate figure of £30 per person, per night. This average estimated accommodation bill, multiplied by around 5,000 individuals, amounts to approximately £600,000. This was substantially ‘new money’ that was likely to have been spent on accommodation in Leicester and its surrounds during the week of the Games.

15.15 To this total on accommodation income can be added the additional spending by family members in local shops, on eating out, and on visiting local attractions during their stay. The Chief Executive of the Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Martin Traynor, told the Leicester Mercury just after the Games, in August 2009:

*There is no doubt that it has been a really positive boost for the city. Tourist attractions including Bosworth Battlefield and Rutland Water saw a significant increase in visitors, while Highcross Leicester drew an extra 10,000 visitors when it had a special late-night shopping event.*<sup>210</sup>

15.16 Figures like the one quoted above are difficult to verify – this additional number of Highcross shoppers seems quite large to us. According to our own survey data, average spend per visitor group during their stay in the area was about £270. In the survey, respondents were asked to select from a band-range of expenditures (e.g. less than £100, £100-£200, up to over £1,000). The mid-point of each expenditure range was used to make this spending calculation (e.g. those replying in the £100-£200 range were estimated to have spent, on average, around £150). Adding together the resultant totals produced by each band meant a total spend figure of some £49,500. Dividing this figure by the total number of respondents who replied to this specific survey question (184), produces an average estimated spend of approximately £269.02 per visitor group, which we have rounded up for our purposes here to £270. We must stress again, our estimates are based on returns from a small sample of family members only.

15.17 Our respondents suggested in their replies that a typical supporter/family group for the 2009 Games was between 2 or 3 people in size, so factoring this into our analysis – an average group size of 2.5 people – produces the following equation: 6,000 family members divided by 2.5 x £270 spend. This produces an estimated total spend figure for all family groups of something around £648,000 for the week of the Games. We can now begin to pull together some of these estimates, as we have done in the simple table provided below.

**Table 15.1: Estimated Additional Spend by Athletes, Coaches and Family Members**

Athletes' spending	£144,000
Coaches' spending	£ 72,000
University accommodation	£1,350,000
Families' accommodation	£ 600,000
Family spending	£ 648,000
<b>Estimated Total</b>	<b>£2,814,000</b>

15.18 This gives an estimate of just over £2.8 million income generated in and around Leicester by the Special Olympics National Summer Games – though the various costs of *providing* accommodation and services are not included here, of course. This total figure compares with the £2.8 million estimated cost of hosting the Games reported earlier and the just under £1 million additional, unanticipated funds committed by Leicester City Council (along with other services) to ensure that the Games actually took place. By these estimates, the other potential benefits of the Games – positive media exposure for the city; the extension of a volunteer workforce; local professional and personal development; the positive impact on local people in Leicester – have been accrued at, arguably, relatively limited financial cost to the city and its businesses and communities, albeit in very difficult economic times.

15.19 Of course, this calculation is an estimate based entirely on a number of assumptions and on replies from a small sample of visitors. No figures are available for income to the city during the period 25 to 30 July in other years when no Special Olympics event took place.<sup>211</sup> Therefore, no comparison can be made with usual expenditure in Leicester by visitors at that time of year. If university accommodation and local hotels would normally have been occupied with a similar number of visitors who may have spent more, then the effect of that lost business to the city would also have to be taken into account in terms of assessing overall benefit.

15.20 Reports in the local press, of hotel proprietors who claimed their businesses had received a boost by the event confirm that new, additional income was generated by the event, though these figures seem somewhat lower than some of our own calculations, which will also include some spending in the areas around the city.

*Estimates by Leicester Chamber of Commerce suggest staging the UK games brought with it a £1.2m boost in trade for city hotels, restaurants and shops. Hotels and bed-and-breakfasts saw takings increase by £250,000 as spectators and families booked out rooms. Restaurants, shops and bars have benefited to the tune of £375,00.<sup>212</sup>*

15.21 Many small and independent businesses, including guesthouses, in the city experienced increased custom during the week of the Games. Maxine Aldred of the Federation of Small Businesses in Leicestershire said [that] ‘across the board a lot of members have been saying the Special Olympics was just the boost they needed.’<sup>213</sup> The impact of such events should not be underestimated. One guesthouse owner, Bob Welland who runs the Abinger Guest House, claimed that the Games had saved his business: ‘Next week is the only week we’ve been full all year. And it’s make-or-break time for us. If it wasn’t for the Games we would be putting up the For Sale boards and moving elsewhere. It’s a real boost.’<sup>214</sup> Another small hotel owner, Robert Brown of Glenfield Lodge welcomed dozens of guests visiting for the Games. He said:

*The Special Olympics are having a positive effect on our bookings and quite a few of the rooms have been booked for the Games. The whole economy is so difficult it’s good to see things looking up.*<sup>215</sup>

15.22 Other hotels reporting increased bookings to the Leicester Mercury were Campbell’s Hotel, the Stage and the Belmont House where special deals were offered to attract visitors to the Games. A spokesperson for the Belmont House said rather more vaguely: ‘We’ve sold quite a few bedrooms for the Special Olympics ... It has given us quite a bit of business.’<sup>216</sup> A total of 4,652 bed-nights over the Games period were reported to Leicester Shire Promotions in feedback from some of the accommodation providers. Our estimated figures, based on the assumptions calculations reported above, are rather higher than this. But as only graded accommodation and only places that supplied feedback contributed to Leicester Shire Promotion’s total, their figure is likely to be an underestimate, in our view. There were 12,696 views of Special Olympics related web pages on the organisation’s website. An additional 6,012 accommodation pages were accessed compared with previous years. There were 2,588 referrals to accommodation websites made and 496 venue pages were served by visitors to the site.<sup>217</sup>

### *Some conclusions*

15.23 Hosting Special Olympics GB National Summer Games is not, nor will it ever be, the guaranteed money-spinner that other mega-sporting events may be. Raising sponsorship and

cutting costs is difficult, even in favourable economic times, and there is only limited revenue available for any hosts from event ticket sales. But the local commitment and financial investment made in the Games by Leicester was generally covered by the additional income and benefits it brought to local businesses. To the additional income referred to above, in this very simple input-output model of calculating the economic impact and leverage of the event can also be added an undefined multiplier as these service and retail sector businesses directly involved increased their own purchasing of additional food and stock which benefits other businesses in the supply chain.<sup>218</sup> In reviewing the overall economic impact eleven months later, Martin Traynor commented that:

*The Special Olympics provided a much welcome boost to the local economy during a very difficult economic period. Our visitor-related businesses and our retail sector both clearly benefitted from this large influx of people. The Special Olympics also gave us a unique opportunity to help raise the profile of Leicester and Leicestershire, as not only as a place to visit but a place to come and do business.*<sup>219</sup>

15.24 Not mentioned so far is income from non-official merchandise sales and any additional income for transport providers, the bus and coach companies used by athletes and families to move around the city. The published accounts of the Games suggest almost £37,000 was raised from official Games merchandise sales and a further £110,000 was raised from the Lord Mayor's appeal.<sup>220</sup> The Games took place at a time when regular contract work with schools and colleges was not taking place due to summer holidays and so companies made use of this seasonal spare capacity without disrupting existing business. Finally, the 2009 Games has produced many other, less easily quantifiable or measureable, benefits for the city of the kind discussed in other parts of this report. Important as event finances are, it is these other impacts which have been the main focus of our research. Below we consider another aspect of the 'soft' legacy of the Games, its impact on the Leicester public.



## 16. The Special Olympics Public Surveys, Feb 2009 – Feb 2010

16.1 Although it was widely argued locally that the 1989 Special Olympics Summer Games experience had been a very positive one for Leicester with some longer term impact for the city, local politicians and officers still had to take more or less 'on trust' the continuing enthusiasm of the Leicester public for hosting the 2009 version of the Games. After all, there had been no extended public consultation regarding the political decision to bring Special Olympics National Summer Games back to Leicester in 2009. Neither, perhaps surprisingly, had there been prior extended local discussions on the issue with agencies in and around the city that routinely dealt with people with learning disabilities.<sup>221</sup> This assumed local public support for the Games might also conceivably have weakened as the global financial situation deteriorated, and especially as it became clear that the Leicester taxpayers might have to fund aspects of the event because of the failure of SOL to raise sponsorship in this increasingly difficult economic climate to cover its anticipated costs.

16.2 In this uncertain climate we wanted to try to measure public support for the Games in Leicester and its surrounding areas and also to test aspects of public knowledge about Special Olympics and learning disability before, during and after the Games took place. We had a number of issues we wanted to try to address in doing so. These included:

- Did the Leicester public know what it was getting regarding the Games and did it offer general support for hosting the event?
- What immediate impact did the Games have on local people around the week of competition?
- What lasting effects, if any, did the Games have on the perceptions of the Leicester public about learning disability and sport?
- Six months after the 'carnival' of GB National Summer Games had left town, did local people still remember Special Olympics?
- And, finally, had their knowledge about learning disability changed at all as a consequence of Leicester hosting the 2009 Games?

16.3 To try to address at least some of these questions we recruited a team of professional interviewers under the direction of Chris Vaughan-Jones from the Marketing Department at De Montfort University to conduct three on-street interview surveys of the Leicester public in various locations in the city. These interviews took place in three stages: at the end of February/early March 2009; during Games Week and just after the Games (end July/early August 2009); and in February 2010, over six months after the Games had ended. In each stage of the survey our intention was to interview around 300 adults – we actually interviewed 300 in Phase 1, 310 in Phase 2 and 309 in Phase 3, making 919 street interviews in all. We aimed for an even split between males and females, and between white British and a combination of British Asian and black ethnicities. This was in order, broadly speaking, to try to reflect the make-up, by ethnicity and gender, of adults living in the city. We applied no hard and fast stipulations for sampling about age, beyond aiming to get a broadly based sample which included representation from older, middle-aged and younger respondents.

16.4 These are rather smaller samples than we would have liked to work with and the extent of sample error increases, of course, the smaller the size of the samples concerned. But given the resource constraints involved, and given that we wanted to sample the local public at three different stages of the process, we had to accept that around 300 interviews per stage would need to be the limit to our ambitions. To be eligible for interview those involved had to be living permanently in Leicester, Leicestershire or Rutland. This was so that people questioned had strong local ties and that – unlike students, for example – our interviewees were reasonably likely to be in the area in July 2009 when the Games took place.

16.5 In the first set of interviews we had no screening, eligibility question, apart from that of permanent residency in Leicester, Leicestershire or Rutland. This first part of the public survey was aimed, simply, at tapping into local views, irrespective of respondents' expressed interest in local sporting and cultural events. In fact, only just over 58% of this first sample (175 respondents) claimed that they were 'interested' to some extent in local cultural and sporting events. This distinction seemed to indicate that such recruits were a little more aware about

Special Olympics than others. Accordingly, for the second and third stages of the public survey we decided to 'screen' all respondents by recruiting people who were local and who also said they were at least 'interested' to some extent in cultural and/or sporting events in the city. This was, additionally, to ensure we provided a more focused look at attitudes among those who claimed to have some level of engagement with local events that were promoted in Leicester.

16.6 In the first batch of on-street interviews, conducted in late-February/early March 2009, our aim was to test recognition among the general public about learning disability and the Games and about who was involved in them. These interviews were conducted *before* the economic problems of the Games were made public, so responses here should not be flavoured at all by news about Leicester City Council's financial 'bailing out' of the Games. There had been some occasional coverage in the local press and on local radio about the approaching Special Olympics Games by this time, but this was typically rather low key and sporadic. There was no real sense – at least not at this stage – that the local media in Leicester was routinely strongly promoting the Games, or that it was working hard to keep Special Olympics in the forefront of local people's perceptions about the city or local sport. The aim of the second phase of the research was to test whether local responses to a similar set of questions we had first asked in February and early March 2009 had changed as a result of the city's immediate experience of hosting the Games. This second phase of interviews was conducted following publicity about the additional financial commitment the City Council had been forced to make to ensure that the Games took place. The third phase of interviews took place in February 2010, about one year after the first phase and just over six months after the end of the Games. Would the Leicester public exhibit any strong memory or show any measurable impact of the city hosting the 2009 Games? In the first survey we found some anticipation and strong public support for the Games, though real knowledge about Special Olympics was quite limited. This local support for the Games strengthened and solidified, according to returns from the second survey. The specific aim of the final survey was to try to measure the extended impact, if any, of hosting the 2009 Games in Leicester.

*(a) Some basic demographic information*

16.7 Table 16.1 shows the demographic outline of the respective survey samples, combining information on the age, sex and the ethnicity of respondents. Our respondents for this phase are reasonably spread by age, though the third sample is younger than the one we recruited in Phase 1 of the research. Also, as in Phase 1, we have recruited slightly more males (52%) than females (48%). In Phase 2 of the research the reverse was the case; our female respondents had the slight edge then over males. We also compare here all three samples using some basic figures on ethnicity. Reported recent estimates (2007) for the population of Leicester suggests approximately it is: 60% white British, 33% British Asian or Asian, 6% black and 1% Chinese and others<sup>222</sup> (though Leicester is moving towards a majority population which is not white British).<sup>223</sup> Our survey samples probably slightly understate the adult white population of the city – though our samples also include people from outside Leicester – and they overstate the proportion of local black people in the city. We can also see some small variations in the different samples by ethnicity – we have rather fewer British Asian respondents in Phase 3 than in the other two phases of the research, for example. Also in Phase 3, white females make up some 57% of all women in the sample, compared to just 52% of the total sample which is white. All these differences – and others – might impact in small ways on the findings, especially when making direct comparisons between the three phases. Finally, in terms of *faith groups*, 46.3% of this final phase of the sampling said they were Christian, 13.7% Muslim, 13.0% Hindu and 4.7% Sikh.

SEX	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Male	52%	48%	52%
Female	48%	52%	48%
No answer	0%	0%	0%

AGE	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
18-30 years	32%	34%	38%
31-50 years	28%	34%	33%
Over 50 years	40%	32%	29%

ETHNICITY	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
White	48%	46%	52%
Black	15%	13.5%	17%
British Asian	32%	31.5%	24%
Other	4%	9%	7%
No answer	1%	0%	0%

**Table 16.1: All three samples: by sex, age and ethnicity**

*(b) Public awareness in Leicester about the 2009 Games*

16.8 In all three surveys we began by asking what we might call an ‘awareness’ question about a major sporting and cultural event that occurred in Leicester in the summer of 2009. In Phase 1, conducted close to six months before the Games, three-out-of ten (30.3%) of the sample said they were aware that some such a event was coming to the city; by Phase 2 this figure had risen to 69.4% – the Games were now taking place or had just ended; by Phase 3, over six months after the Games, this figure had dropped again to 39.5% – to almost pre-Games levels of awareness. But perhaps the important question here was how many of our respondents who were ‘interested’ in sporting or cultural events in the city could identify *Special Olympics*, or something very like it, as the event which Leicester hosted in July 2009? Table 16.1 provides the answer.

Event	Phase 1: Feb/Mar 2009	Phase2: July 2009	Phase3: Feb 2010
Identified Special Olympics, or similar	30.8%	63.5%	30.1%

**Table 16.2: If you are aware of an event in Leicester in the summer of 2009, what is/was that event?**

16.9 These findings may not be hugely surprising. Local public awareness was clearly quite low in the build-up to the Games, peaked during the period when the Games were being staged in Leicester (but still missed the attention of more than one-third of all local respondents), and then fell away again quite substantially to pre-Games levels of awareness over the six months that followed. This might suggest that to obtain maximum public impact from an event of this kind one needs to examine ways of publicising early and trying to keep the Games in public view over a longer period; periodically returning to memories of the event via the press and City Council publications, for example, or by extensive use of the internet. A 'one year on' retrospective about the athletes and their lives since Leicester might be a useful way of reviving happy memories of the Games and might have kept the event more strongly in the local public consciousness. This is perhaps especially important because the Leicester public offered such strong popular support for the city hosting the Games. We can say that, even with little of this sort of important promotional and reflective work, roughly three-out-of-ten people from the Leicester area, unprompted, recalled Special Olympics some six months after the event. When we prompted our respondents by asking them if they recalled a specific 'sporting event' in the city in July of 2009, a further 17 people identified Special Olympics, or something very like it, taking the final recognition figure six months after the Games to a slightly more positive 35.6%. Typically, it was older, white people (over 50 years) who remembered the Games better than younger people from other ethnic backgrounds. But almost two-thirds of the sample could *not* identify Special Olympics six months on. In some cases this was because respondents highlighted and recalled more regular local summer events in the city: the Leicester Caribbean Carnival, or the Summer Sundae music festival, for example.

16.10 In the final phase of the research we also asked a new question to those respondents who had successfully recalled the Games: what had been the *best* and *worst* things about hosting them in Leicester? We have aggregated these responses in Tables 16.3 and 16.4. As one can see, it was extremely difficult for our respondents to come up with any negatives here, though lack of publicity about the Games – a common complaint throughout the three public surveys – did emerge again for a small number of respondents.

**Q6a THE ONE WORST THING ABOUT LEICESTER SPECIAL OLYMPICS**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>none/nothing</b>	<i>61</i>	<i>19.7</i>	<i>55.0</i>
<b>not publicised/high profile enough</b>	<i>15</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>13.5</i>
<b>that I didn't go</b>	<i>2</i>	<i>.6</i>	<i>1.8</i>
<b>others</b>	<i>12</i>	<i>3.9</i>	<i>10.8</i>
<b>don't know/no answer</b>	<i>21</i>	<i>6.8</i>	<i>18.9</i>
<b>Total</b>	<i>111</i>	<i>35.9</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<b>Missing</b>	<i>198</i>	<i>64.1</i>	
<b>Total</b>	<i>309</i>	<i>100.0</i>	

Table 9 - Base = 111= codes 1 & 2 at Q5b, + codes 1 & 2 at Q5d

**Table 16.3: What was the single worst thing about Leicester hosting the Special Olympics last July?**

16.11 Among the 'best' things about hosting the event were many of the issues commented upon by our respondents in a slightly different context in Phase 2, thus confirming their local importance. These include: the visitors and additional business brought to Leicester; the raised profile of the city; the 'bringing together' of local people, including the disabled; and the role of Leicester in acting as hosts for an event which was especially important for the athletes and families directly involved (see Table 16.4). However, no dominant positive outcome emerges from these findings perhaps reflecting the lack of a sustained post-Games message about the local benefits of hosting the event.

# Q6bB THE ONE BEST THING ABOUT LEICESTER SPECIAL OLYMPICS

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
brings money/people/visitors/business to Leicester	16	5.2	14.4
that Leicester hosted it	11	3.6	9.9
raises profile of the city/name 'on map'	28	9.1	25.2
good for city	8	2.6	7.2
brings people (all sorts) together	3	1.0	2.7
brings able & disabled together	9	2.9	8.1
good for competitors	7	2.3	6.3
others	15	4.9	13.5
don't know / no answer	14	4.5	12.6
Total	111	35.9	100.0
Missing	198	64.1	
Total	309	100.0	

Table 10 - base = 111 = codes 2 & 3 at Q5c, + codes 1 & 2 at Q5d

**Table 16.4: What was the single best thing about Leicester hosting the Special Olympics last July?**

## *(c) Changing local awareness about Special Olympics*

16.12 For those who had *not* successfully identified Special Olympics in Phase 3, we then told them that it was the Summer Games that Leicester had hosted in July 2009. How many of these people had heard of Special Olympics? From these questions we could work out – as we had done in Phases 1 & 2 – roughly what proportion of all our respondents showed *any* recognition of Special Olympics, even if they could not specifically identify the Summer Games in Leicester. This was important to us of course because it might throw some light on what longer-term impact hosting the Games might have had on local recognition of the concept of Special Olympics. Table 16.5 shows that recognition of Special Olympics before the Games among people who were ‘interested’ in sporting or cultural events was reasonably high at just under two-thirds (62.3%). But by the time the Games had arrived in Leicester a much larger majority of people in the sample could recognise the concept of Special Olympics: news about it, after all, was all around them. Six months afterwards, there had been some ‘recognition attrition’ from the summer peak, but also a little evidence of positive impact: close to seven-out-of-ten



(69.6%) of local respondents in the Leicester area were still able to show recognition of Special Olympics. The samples are quite small, but these figures may suggest some modest movement in awareness from the pre-Games figure. We would need reliable national data on recognition of Special Olympics to measure the real local impact of hosting the Games in Leicester. But it would be surprising to us if general public recognition of Special Olympics exceeded that which is reported here.

Event	Phase 1: Feb/Mar 2009	Phase2: July 2009	Phase3: Feb 2010
'Heard' of Special Olympics	62.3%	82.6%	69.6%

**Table 16.5: Respondents who identified Special Olympics in Leicester in summer of 2009, or who said they had 'heard' of Special Olympics**

16.13 When we asked our Phase 3 respondents what sorts of people took part in Special Olympics we got similar kinds of replies as we had in the earlier two phases. We have grouped these below in Table 16.6. Again, Down's Syndrome as a specific category of learning disability figured here, but physical disability continued to be strongly represented too, and very few respondents used the precise discourse of 'learning disability' to describe those involved in the Games. In all three phases of the research a substantial minority of respondents also mentioned the specific educational needs of those involved. Many people did, however, refer to 'handicaps' or 'difficulties' people had with learning, though autism and dyslexia also figured in all three phases of the research, but for a small (and falling) number of respondents. It is difficult to track here other notable changes in the language or categorisations used by local people about people with learning disabilities involved in Special Olympics over the period of one year covered by the research, though the *physical* disabilities of some of the learning disabled becomes a more prominent feature in public accounts over time. Also, during and after the Games fewer respondents were willing to admit they simply did not *know* what sorts of people might be involved in the Games.

CATEGORY	Phase 1: Feb/Mar 2009	Phase 2: July 2009	Phase 3: Feb 2010
Mental handicap/disabilities	45%	49%	47%
Difficulties learning	41%	34%	43%
Down's Syndrome	29%	18%	18%
Special needs	25%	23%	30%
Physically disabled	36%	40%	48%
Dyslexia	16%	12%	10%
Autism	26%	11%	6%
Psychological probs.	15%	4%	4%
Don't know/NA	26%	11%	8%

**Table 16.6 Can you say what sort of people you think might take part in the Special Olympics?**

*(d) Public awareness about learning disabilities*

16.14 After explaining that Special Olympics was in fact a sporting activity for people with 'learning disabilities we asked all our samples had they previously *heard* of the concept of 'learning disabilities'? The vast majority of people in all three phases of the research claimed to have done so (see Table 16.7)

Concept	Phase 1: Feb/Mar 2009	Phase2: July 2009	Phase3: Feb 2010
People who had heard of 'learning disabilities'	87.0%	87.4%	84.1%

**Table 16.7: Special Olympics is a national sporting event for people with learning disabilities. Have you heard the term 'learning disabilities' before?**

16.15 But what exactly did our respondents *understand* by the term 'learning disability'? We have grouped together the typically most popular responses here from combining the three phases of the research. Again it is quite difficult to track real changes in perceptions and understanding from these responses, but it might be significant that slightly more people in the third phase of the research highlighted the fact that learning disability is one that exists from birth (in phase 2 this response fell below a 5% threshold). We could also see some small signs here that specific conditions, such as Down's Syndrome, were beginning to emerge more

strongly as reported conditions among the general samples in phases 2 & 3 of the research, though still not in large enough numbers to make it into this table.

Meaning of LD	Phase 1: Feb/Mar 2009	Phase 2: July 2009	Phase 3: Feb 2010
Difficulty learning, absorbing information, understanding	35.6%	30.7%	31.3%
Slow learner, can't learn	19.5%	25.2%	20.1%
Mental problems, handicap, damage	27.2%	16.7%	22.4%
Problems coping with everyday, simple tasks	8.0%	13.3%	9.3%
Special needs, requires support, schooling	10.0%	11.9%	3.1%
Dyslexia or similar	8.4%	10.4%	5.8%
Have difficulty reading & writing	10.3%	8.1%	12.7%
Have it from birth	2.7%	N/A	9.3%

**Table 16.8: What, if anything, does the term 'learning disability' mean to you?**

*(e) Attending Special Olympics*

16.16 Some 28 people in our final sample (9.1%) claimed to have actually *attended* some event during the Games Week. If this reflects wider patterns it suggests an estimate that there may have been somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 local people who were directly involved in the Games Week, either as spectators or as supporters of other Games events. Some of these would have attended the Opening Ceremony. Athletics was the most popular sporting event here – arguably the signature event of any 'Olympics' – though we also had people who had attended swimming, football and basketball, and some local people surveyed attended non-sporting activities directly connected with the Games (see Table 16.9).

### Q11b EVENTS ATTENDED (Multiple mentions)

	Responses	
	Number of mentions	Percent of Cases
Athletics	7	25.0%
Basketball	3	10.7%
Table Tennis	1	3.6%
Tennis	1	3.6%
Football	4	14.3%
Swimming	4	14.3%
Running	4	14.3%
Opening Ceremony	4	14.3%
Others	3	28.6%

Table 17 - Base = 28 = 'Yes' at Q11a

Table 16.9: Which Special Olympics events did you attend? (Phase 3)

### Q11c REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING (Multiple mentions)

	Responses	
	Number of mentions	Percent of Cases
Didn't know about it / not aware / never heard of it	68	24.4%
No Reason	17	6.1%
Working	34	12.2%
Don't like / not interested in sport	20	7.2%
Busy / no time	23	10.0%
Not interested / would not enjoy	43	15.4%
Away / abroad / on holiday	19	6.8%
Saw some of it on TV	15	5.4%
No tickets	5	1.8%
No information	7	2.5%
No	4	1.4%
Didn't know anyone going	4	1.4%
Didn't know anyone in it	7	2.5%
Didn't think to go / not involved	7	2.5%
Others	32	11.5%
Don't know / no answer	16	5.7%

Table 18 - Base = 279 = 'No' at Q11a

Table 16.10: Can you say why you did *not* attend any Special Olympics events? (Phase 3)

16.17 When we asked the main body of the sample in Phase 3 – this is people who had said they were ‘interested’ in cultural or sporting events in Leicester – why they had *not* attended Special Olympics events in July 2009, we saw some interesting responses (Table 16.10). One person told us, for example, that:

*I suppose most people would associate sporting events with strong, fit, able-bodied and able-minded people. This maybe why these Olympics are not attended by people with no special interest in special needs or are not close to anyone with those problems, I assume, because I do not see or hear that much about these events.*

But there were also more familiar refrains, especially about a relative *lack of information* about the Games and how to attend. Almost one-quarter (24.4%) of those who did not attend the Games cited *lack of knowledge* about Special Olympics in Leicester as one of the main reasons why they had not done so. Perhaps some people rationalise their non-attendance in an interview situation and try to ‘find’ an answer for the interviewer. This may be partly the case here. It may also be true that no matter how hard one publicises events there will always be local people who miss the message. But it also possible that more people in the city and outside Leicester might have made more effort to attend events had the Games been better advertised and Games publicity better targeted. A number of our respondents here also said – quite understandably – that sport was not really their thing. Others pointed out that they were on holiday in July, or else that the Games were mainly held during normal working hours – an obvious and insurmountable disincentive for some.

16.18 We also asked our Phase 3 subjects to respond to a statement explicitly about the promotion and advertising of the Games in Leicester (see Table 16.11). One can see here the relatively lukewarm response from our interviewees: only just over one-quarter of the sample (26.5%) agreed with the statement and fewer than one-in-twenty (4.5%) strongly agreed: food for thought perhaps.

**Q12xii SPECIAL OLYMPICS WERE WELL ADVERTISED AND PROMOTED**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Don't know / no answer	21	6.8	6.8
Strongly agree	14	4.5	11.3
Agree	68	22.0	33.3
Neither agree nor disagree	52	16.8	50.2
Disagree	84	27.2	77.3
Strongly disagree	70	22.7	100.0
Total	309	100.0	

Table 30 - Base = all = 309

**Table 16.11: I think the Special Olympics were well advertised and promoted in Leicester last summer**

16.19 Younger people were generally less knowledgeable about the Games than older people in the surveys. Was this because of the news sources they used – or was it because it is more difficult to make disability a relevant issue for the young? Comments from people in Phase 3 of the survey only served to emphasise the perceived local problems of advertising and promotion of the Games – as they had also done in Phase 2. We include just a small number of similar statements below:

*'Only advertise it more'*

*'Sorry, I don't know much. I feel a bit bad about it now'*

*'If [you] do it again, promote and market it better'*

*'If was advertised well? It could have been promoted better'*

*'Thought the promotion and advertising information etc nearly non-existent. I have a daughter with learning disabilities, and so that's how I knew. They can't have expected a very big turnout'*

*'I have no information or have heard nothing about this. I don't know or can say much'*

*'Need to publicise the event earlier and far more widespread for future games'*

*'It came and went: not enough real publicity'*

*(f) Public responses in Leicester to hosting Special Olympics*

16.20 We next asked our respondents in all three phases of the research to respond to a series of statements about hosting Special Olympics in Leicester. We are able to compare the responses to some of these statements across all three phases of the research. We have done a little rounding up in places in the tables that follow. In these comparisons we are looking here only at the responses of people in Phase 1 who said they were generally 'interested' in sporting or cultural events in the city in order to maintain consistency across the sample comparisons. We firstly

offered all interviewees opportunities to comment on a very general statement about their *support* for Leicester hosting the 2009 Games. We wondered how, if at all, support in the city might have changed over time – a period of about one year – among those ‘interested’ in sporting or cultural events in the city. We have brought these responses together in Table 16.12.

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know No answer
Phase 1	51.4%	44.0%	2.9%	1.1%	0.6%	0.0%
Phase 2	39.7%	54.8%	3.2%	0.3%	0.6%	1.3%
Phase 3	40.5%	47.6%	8.1%	1.0%	0.0%	2.9%

**Table 16.12: I am in favour of Leicester hosting Special Olympics**

16.21 We can see here that public support for the Games in Leicester was overwhelmingly strong all along, but that it seems to have peaked six months before Games Week (in Phase 1). It was also noticeable that some people in the surveys had a personal investment in the Games coming to Leicester because of their own links to learning disability, as the following comments from Phase 1 of the research testify:

*‘My son has learning disability, so it’s good that they are being recognised as part of the community’*

*‘[I] have a Down’s Syndrome godson. [It is good] that they be recognised: they are part of society’*

*‘My eldest daughter is at university doing a degree in disability course’*

*‘I have a son with disabilities’*

Despite these links, perhaps the funding crisis did have a small impact on responses in Phase 2. But perhaps what is more impressive here – and even a little surprising – is the way in which very strong local support has survived for some time *after* the Games. This relatively enduring support for hosting the Games rather confirms, in our view, the focus of the sample on supporting the *principle* of Special Olympics. That is, even if respondents had little contact with the Games, did not know they had taken place in Leicester, or were even initially unsure about

what Special Olympics was, once informed they strongly supported the *idea* of the Games for those involved – and Leicester’s role in supporting them.

16.22 We next offered respondents the chance to comment on a statement about Special Olympics and the *national image* of Leicester (see Table 16.13). The *tense* of the question had to change, of course, because of the timing of the surveys, but the topic remained the same. The most striking things here is, arguably, the falling off, over time, of some of the certainty and positivity around the Games that existed strongly in July 2009 and even more so before the Games. By early 2010, only just over half of all respondents (54.7%) were still sure enough to disagree with this statement, and by implication, to assert that Leicester’s image had indeed been enhanced – or certainly not damaged – by hosting the 2009 Games. This compares with 82.3% of those who said they were ‘interested’ in sporting or cultural events in Leicester who had *expected* the same thing six months before the Games. Of course, six months after the Games, respondents might be thinking rather harder about the real, tangible *evidence* of Leicester’s improved national standing – and that is rather difficult to demonstrate. Again, the financial issues around the Games may also have come into play here and in some people’s eyes might have damaged the city’s wider reputation.

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don’t know No answer
Phase 1	0.6%	8.6%	7.4%?	46.3%	36.0%	1.1%
Phase 2	1.3%	9.4%	15.2%	43.8%	28.4%	1.9%
Phase 3	0.3%	7.8%	25.9%	30.4%	24.3%	11.3%

**Table 16.13: Hosting the Special Olympics in Leicester in July will not/has not improve(d) the national image of the city**

16.23 By Phase 3 of the survey research we can see here that more local people were simply *unsure* about the wider impact of the Games. This might be simply because memories are dimmed here but it also might suggest again that there was not enough post-Games public reflection (and even celebration) in Leicester by the organisers. Perhaps there was just too little



emphasis locally on the collection and publication of information about the wider effects of the Games and about what those involved had said about their visit to Leicester. Some of this sort of celebratory exchange occurred later in the letters pages of the local press, of course. But this was typically ad hoc and came out only in dribs and drabs. It largely lost its potential collective impact for most of the Leicester public. The later *Games Evaluation Report* was lengthy and was not generally made available to the public. Neither SOGB nor SOL produced an accessible public account soon after the Games finished about its successes and the wider recognition it afforded the city of Leicester. There was no publicised ‘official’ congratulation for the people and officials in the city from SOGB for hosting and supporting the event.<sup>224</sup> Such public ‘trumpet-blowing’ may not feel comfortable for all the people involved with Special Olympics or for Leicester City Council, but perhaps more could have been done to publicly reward those involved and to say more about the ways in which the Games had successfully profiled the city. Had this been the case the impact in the mind of the Leicester public might have been longer-lasting. However, there were plenty of people in the Phase 3 sample who saw plenty to shout about re the impact of the Games on perceptions of Leicester:

*‘A nice thing for Leicester to do – it shows caring and kindness’*

*‘Good for city and for people taking part’*

*‘Puts Leicester on the map’*

*‘Good for Leicester – always in the shadow of Nottingham’*

*‘Good publicity for Leicester’*

*‘Shows Leicester is a caring place’*

*‘Good for Leicester to be part of a national event’*

16.24 Had hosting Special Olympics added to the *knowledge* of local people about the issue of learning disabilities? This would seem to be part of the wider agenda for any city hosting the Games, and presumably for SOGB too. We offered a couple of related statements on this score at different phases of the survey research (see Table 16.14). In Phase 1 we used a positive

statement about Special Olympics adding to personal knowledge about learning disability. In Phase 3 we *reversed* the statement by suggesting to our respondents that Special Olympics had *not* actually added to their knowledge in this respect. The results – again comparing only those from Phase 1 who said were ‘interested’ in sporting or cultural events in the city – are contained in Table 16.12.

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know No answer
Phase 1	24.0%	51.4%	13.2%	9.1%	1.7%	0.6%
Phase 3	2.9%	42.1%	22.3%	19.1%	9.4%	4.2%

**Table 16.14: Holding the Special Olympics in Leicester *will add to* (Phase1) *has not added to* (Phase 3) my knowledge of those with learning disabilities**

16.25 How should we interpret these findings? Clearly, the anticipation *before* the Games was that many people ‘interested’ in sport or cultural events in and around the city would, indeed, learn a lot more about learning disability from having the Special Olympics National Summer Games in town. A substantial majority of people in the Phase 1 sample felt this way (75.4%). However, just six months after the event much of this early promise seems to have remained quite unfulfilled. Just under half (45.0%) thought they had actually *not* added to their knowledge, and fewer than three out-of-ten (28.5%) respondents now felt able to challenge the statement that hosting the Games had *not* added to their knowledge. Remember, around one-quarter of the Phase 3 respondents showed little or no knowledge that the Games had actually taken place in the city, so this fact will impact strongly here. Reversing the original statement from Phase 1 probably complicates matters a little here. But it also seems reasonable to suggest that the possibility of using the Games for informing the local public about learning disability had not worked for the majority of people in the post-Games sample, and that this relative failure was counter to the original *expectations* of local people on this front. As we argued in our discussion of media coverage of the Games, these findings also offer some support for our view that the Games in Leicester was generally *not* a moment when the wider agenda concerning of learning disability was strongly brought to the fore in public debate for everyone. Instead, publicity for the Games was missed by a substantial minority and – perhaps

understandably – the local media focus was ambivalent: a sporting one, but also one which emphasised the individual life narratives and ‘courage’ of particular athletes and families, rather than one which promoted a wider discussion of the issues raised by the learning disability agenda.

16.26 In Phase 2, in a connected area, we asked respondents to comment on a statement that ‘Holding Special Olympics in Leicester is changing my awareness of the problems faced by those with learning disabilities.’ In Phase 3 we offered the statement that hosting the Games ‘has made me more aware’ of such problems. How do the results to these very similar statements compare (see Table 16.15)? Again we can see some slight slippage over time in these responses: fewer than one-in-five (19.4%) were negative in relation to this statement during the Games, a figure which rose to close to three-out-of-ten (29.8%) just six months on. Our sample is much more split when questioned some time after the Games; in short, when the learning disability issue feels ‘hot’ responses here are much more positive. With time for cooler reflection, perhaps a little more realism begins to take hold. Certainly, responses from interviewees in Phase 2 were especially powerful, as the following selected comments attest:

*‘Wonderful! [It produced] more awareness of the people with learning disabilities’*  
*‘Raised awareness, so [it is] good. It helps [people with a learning disability] to lead a normal life – [We] need to support them’*  
*‘[Games] gives people more compassion for disabled people’*  
*‘I just think it is good to raise awareness’*  
*‘Disability often is the disability of the able bodied in that they hold stigma and have views that are not correct.*  
*‘Much more awareness, more investment [needed]’*

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don’t know No answer
Phase 2	10.6%	30.6%	37.1%	18.1%	1.3%	2.3%
Phase 3	8.7%	25.9%	32.7%	27.2%	2.6%	2.9%

**Table 16.15: Hosting Special Olympics is changing my awareness/making me more aware of the problems of people with learning disabilities.**

16.27 White respondents were also slightly more convinced that they were now more ‘aware’ of learning disability than were Asians in the city. But, more positively, six months on from the Games in Leicester more than one-third (34.6%) of all respondents feel their awareness *has* been raised. The question remains, of course, that in one year’s time will this figure on awareness continue to fall again, perhaps down to 25% – or less? It also raises the important question of how best can host cities *maintain* and build upon raised awareness after the Games have gone.

16.28 Crucial to the success of Special Olympics in Leicester was managing to *invest* the necessary funds in the event, even when willing sponsors could not be found. Again, looking in Phase 1 only at those 175 people who had expressed an ‘interest’ in sporting or cultural events in Leicester, we can examine if and how local support for funding the 2009 Games changed, if at all, over the one year period around Leicester hosting the event. We need to remember here that the fact about substantial public money being invested to rescue the Games was only known for Phases 2 and 3 of the research, and that we offered our respondents a negative statement for them to comment upon in this respect. The results are presented in Table 16.16.

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don’t know No answer
Phase 1	0.6%	1.1%	2.9%	24.6%	69.1	1.7%
Phase 2	0.3%	2.3%	5.8%	47.4%	43.2%	1.0%
Phase 3	1.0%	4.9%	13.6%	36.6%	41.3%	2.6%

**Table 16.16: I am against Leicester investing funds in sporting events like this one.**

16.29 There has been some obvious fall-off in public support here from the Phase 1 peak, before the finding crisis was known, and from the Phase 2 enthusiasm around the time the Games were taking place. There are also a small number of barbed comments from respondents in Phase 2 of the research about the costs of hosting the event. *‘I am concerned local people are footing the £800,000 bill to host the Olympics’*, said one. *‘[The Games were] poorly publicised/ advertised. Had consultants to generate sponsorship; they didn’t meet targets*

*and ratepayers had to find £1,000,000’, responded another. But even six months after the event, local public support for funding this – and possibly future similar events – is clearly overwhelming. Certainly, local opposition to funding events like this one is hard to find. As one respondent put it: ‘This kind of funding makes a very big difference to people who otherwise don’t get a look in.’ The wider Leicester public, it seems, is willing – and possibly waiting – to lend its support to future Games or other similar events, as the following comments testify: ‘Bring them on again’; ‘Hope they do it again!’; ‘Hopefully, bring them on again’; ‘Bring them on again, man’; ‘Hope they do it again, and learn from the last ones’; ‘I hope it’s done again in Leicester’; ‘Is it likely to become an annual event?’*

16.30 For all three phases of the research we also included a statement which really has no direct connection with interest or lack of interest in local sporting or cultural events: perceptions of community support, by ethnicity, for people with learning disabilities. That being the case we look at the replies from everyone in each of the three Phases in Table 16.17. Did the experience of hosting the Games offer the chance for any reflections here? What seems to have happened here is that the prospect, or actuality, of hosting Special Olympics in the city has offered a particular focus for people’s overall, rather positive, views on this matter. But once that focus has passed – six months after the Games, for example – then rather more uncertainly begins to encroach into people’s minds on this question. By February 2010 almost three-out-of-ten people in our survey admit they really don’t *know* about the level of community understanding and support offered for people with a learning disability.

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don’t know No answer
Phase 1	27.7%	49.0%	14.3%	5.7%	0.0%	3.3%
Phase 2	23.2%	53.0%	19.0%	3.5%	0.3%	1.0%
Phase 3	19.4%	48.2%	22.7%	2.6%	0.3%	6.8%

**Table 16.17: Friends and family from my ethnic background usually do show good understanding and support for those with ‘learning disabilities’**

16.31 The presence or promise of the Games seems to make some people want to *believe* the best about responses from those they feel closest to, but its absence and relative distance raises some old doubts and questions. Could it be that the unusual local focus on learning disability for Special Olympics (for a short time at least) makes the whole community *feel* more positive about what it *thinks* it is doing for people with such disabilities? That is certainly one way to read these findings, though sampling differences might also play a part here. But what also seems to emerge strongly from these findings is a rather different emphasis by *ethnicity*. Some 57% of white people in Leicester agreed their communities offered good ‘understanding and support’, but this figure grows to 82% for Asians in the sample in Phase 3. Is this an endorsement of the greater reliance on Asian family structures for dealing with a form of disability which other external bodies seem to find so difficult to reach in such communities? It is perhaps especially interesting that local Asians in Leicester proclaim such rigorous support for their own communities in this respect, when so few Asian people took part as athletes in Special Olympics in 2009 in the city.

16.32 In Phases 2 and 3 we asked respondents for their views about opportunities provided by the Games for *mixing* with people with learning disabilities, and about the extent to which (if at all) hosting the Games had provided a *boost* for the city. Had views on these issues changed in the following six months? Not much had really changed concerning the former (see Table 16.18). The interviewer effect may be in play here – what sort of respondent would want to be seen to be arguing the opposite case?

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know No answer
Phase 2	22.6%	68.1%	7.1%	1.6%	0.3%	0.3%
Phase 3	22.0%	62.1%	9.4%	1.3%	0.0%	5.2%

**Table 16.18: It is/was good to have the opportunity to mix with people with learning disabilities during the Games**

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know No answer
Phase 2	24.8%	61.7%	9.0%	2.6%	0.3%	1.6%
Phase 3	16.5%	51.7%	21.4%	2.3%	0.0%	8.1%

**Table 16.19: Hosting Special Olympics in July is/was a boost for the city of Leicester and its people**

16.33 There had, though, been some ‘slippage’ in the very positive feelings about the Games offering a boost to the city from July 2009, but perhaps that was inevitable (Table 16.19). After all, the immediate presence of the Games gave Leicester a noticeable ‘buzz’ and something of a national focus. However, more than two-thirds (68.3%) of our respondents still felt that the Games had offered a boost for Leicester some six months after it had left the city – an attritional fall from 85.6% at the height of Games excitement in the city, but still a highly promising response. Certainly very few people in Leicester thought that the opposite was the case, although white respondents (75.8%) were noticeably more positive here than were British Asians (60%).

16.34 If most Leicester people still felt six months after the Games it was ‘good’ to be able to *mix* with people with learning disabilities, did they also think that the Games had been an influence in bringing disabled and non-disabled people in the city closer together in the long run? In Phase 2 we included a statement on ‘bringing people in the city closer together’ and it was clear then, from some respondents’ comments, that this statement had been interpreted as meaning bringing disabled and non-disabled people closer together. So for Phase 3 we decided to make our statement explicitly *about* bringing these two ‘groups’ in the city closer (Table 16.20). White respondents (72%) were rather more enthusiastic on this issue than British Asians (56%). Of course few respondents will have any hard data to go on here. Are these positive responses, therefore, reflections of hope rather than real belief or ones based on experience? This seems more than likely. Nevertheless, almost two-thirds (65.3%) of our respondents thought there had been positive developments here, far outweighing the sceptics

on this matter. Of course, if *no* real change has actually occurred since the Games, then *thinking* there *has* been change can actually be damaging – nothing more needs to be done – rather than uplifting or optimistic.

#### Q12vi HAS BROUGHT DISABLED AND NON-DISABLED CLOSER

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Don't know / no answer	36	11.7	11.7
Strongly agree	44	14.2	25.9
Agree	158	51.1	77.0
Neither agree nor disagree	58	18.8	95.8
Disagree	11	3.6	99.4
Strongly disagree	2	.6	100.0
Total	309	100.0	

Table 24 - Base = all = 309

**Table 16.20: I think it is likely that hosting the Special Olympics has brought disabled and non-disabled people in Leicester closer together.**

16.35 Comments on this score from interviewees seem to confirm the general view that one of the key contributions of Special Olympics – in the eyes of the Leicester general public, at least – is to bring people with learning disabilities more into the mainstream of public life – to allow them to ‘join in’ – albeit only for a brief period. Heavily implicit here, of course, is the notion that in everyday life people with learning disabilities are simply excluded from ‘ordinary’ life. There is also an interesting perceptual counter expressed below to the view that Special Olympics perpetuates such social divisions and exclusions, rather than contributing to the better integrating of people with learning disabilities, as these selected comments from Phases 2 & 3 suggest:

*‘[The Games are] good thing. Disabled people need the opportunity to join in and not feel different’*

*‘[I] just think it gives disabled people an opportunity to join in’*

*‘A good idea – [it] brings people closer and gives people with a disability an opportunity to show skills’*

*‘Bringing people together – making a difference’*

*‘Leicester is good at events as events for different cultures – mixed cultures in city’*

*‘Very good to give disabled a chance to do ordinary things’*



*'Brings disabled people more into mainstream life – good for them, and us'*

*'Makes those taking part feel important and part of society'*

*'Keeps people active. Good for disabled – and not left out'*

*'Good for all members of the community to have a chance to join in and have pleasure'*

*'Good to bring visitors to Leicester and good for people who don't usually get a chance to join in'*

16.36 In Phase 2 & 3 we offered respondents the chance to tell us how *interested* – or not – they were in people with learning disabilities. Our aim here was to see if the *moment* of hosting the Games raised people's professed interest, and also exactly how far this supposed interest might have fallen, even just six months after the Games had left the city. We are a little surprised how stable these figures seem to be – and there are few ethnic differences – but perhaps we should not be. After all, it is also difficult for any interviewee to profess coldly to lack 'interest' in a disadvantaged group, such as the learning disabled. We could find little evidence either that many respondents in Phase 3 thought that hosting the Games had made them think 'more negatively' about people with learning disabilities – 78.7% directly challenged this notion, with only 8 respondents in total (2.6%) agreeing that the Games had moved their views in this direction.

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know No answer
Phase 2	1.3%	7.7%	8.1%	41.3%	41.3%	0.3%
Phase 3	0.0%	2.3%	11.3%	45.3%	37.5%	3.6%

**Table 16.21: I am not interested in people with learning disabilities**

16.37 *Civic pride* in Leicester hosting Special Olympics had been very strong in July and August 2009, when the Games were going on and were still very fresh in the local public memory. Would local people feel quite so proud of Leicester's role after this initial passion had dimmed a

little, with time? The answer here seems to be largely ‘Yes’: indeed, we could find no local people, six months after the Games had ended, who argued that there was no reason for the city to feel proud of its role (see Table 16.22). In fact, the vast majority of respondents still seemed to celebrate the local pride inherent in having hosted the Games. Attrition here, in terms of public fatigue concerning local pride, actually seems remarkably low. This is perhaps especially impressive given the public spend on the Games and the increasingly obvious constraints which were coming to Leicester and elsewhere on local public spending and services.

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know No answer
Phase 2	33.2%	63.3%	2.9%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
Phase 3	32.4%	56.2%	7.8%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%

**Table 16.22: Leicester should be proud of hosting the Special Olympics**

16.38 However, expressions of civic pride only go so far: what of the *business and tourism* impact on the city? Again, at the height of local enthusiasm for the Games, responses were very positive on the capacity of the Games to bring visitors to Leicester, as the selective comments below suggest. But would such enthusiasm survive the passing of time? It seems that it has, as Table 16.23 reveals. Almost nine-out-of-ten respondents (87.1%) remained confident in February 2010 that the Games had indeed been a ‘good way’ of bringing people to the city.

*‘Just good for city – brings in visitors and goods. [There are] no things for underprivileged people’*

*‘Good for Leicester – brings people here’*

*‘Anything they can do to bring money into the city is a good thing’*

*‘Good for income of city – brings visitors’*

*‘Boost for Leicester’*

*‘Brings money into Leicester’*

*‘[Shows] how to boost morale and business here’*

*‘It’s a good idea – people come to Leicester and bring business.’*

Phase	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know No answer
Phase 2	26.5%	67.6%	2.3%	2.3%	0.3%	1.0%
Phase 3	24.6%	62.5%	5.2%	0.6%	0.3%	6.8%

**Table 16.23: Hosting Special Olympics is a good way of bringing visitors to Leicester**

16.39 But what about the potential *long-term benefits* of Special Olympics in Leicester for local people with learning difficulties? Did the Leicester public, six months after the event, feel that hosting the Games would offer any longer term benefits for this community, beyond their immediate impact? This is clearly difficult terrain for most people, one that requires some considerable speculation or hope/expectation about the future. However, only one-in-20 respondents (4.8%) thought that there would be *no* long-term benefits for local people with learning difficulties. They were far outnumbered by those – 60.8% – who agreed that as a result of hosting the Games there *would* be (some) benefits for the learning disabled in Leicester. White people were slightly more assured on this point than Asians in the sample. The precise *nature* of these presumed benefits – and whether they had actually occurred – we could not cover in this survey. There is also the underlying concern here that for some people in the survey it might seem that hosting the Games itself had done the necessary work to enable things to improve for local people with learning disabilities, rather than hosting Special Olympics be regarded as a symbolic platform for the launch of future developments.

### *Summary*

16.40 So what can we say in summary about the results of our public surveys on Special Olympics and perceptions of learning disability? We should reiterate that these were very small surveys, limited because of economic restraints, and that this is the first time such public survey work has been conducted around the hosting of Special Olympics in the UK. We are hopeful that this may be a platform for future survey work, very much something to be built upon and extended by future researchers.

16.41 Firstly, the Leicester public was strongly supportive throughout about hosting the 2009 Games in the city, even though initial awareness of what was *about* to happen was actually quite low and even though only just over two-thirds of the public surveyed actually *knew* about the event, even as it was occurring. In many respects the strong general support for the idea of hosting the Games peaked among people who were interested in sporting or cultural events in the city some time *before* the Games arrived in Leicester. Support for *hosting* the Games in the city and for *investing* in the event – and possibly in future similar events – hardly wavered over the year of the study, despite the publicity around the City Council having to fund much of the event from local taxpayers' income. However, *awareness* of Special Olympics was quite high before the Games, peaked during the staging of the event, and fell away again quite quickly over the next six months. The public in Leicester – and elsewhere we would argue – requires regular and reasonably continuous media coverage of the continuing *process* of Special Olympics to keep it strongly in the public mindset, even though we would argue that general awareness about learning disability in Leicester is now probably rather higher than in other parts of the country as a result of the city hosting the Games.

16.42 There is a general sense running through the three phases of the survey that hosting the Games was 'good' for the city of Leicester in terms of its *national profile*, offering a *boost* for people in the city in rather difficult times, and for *bringing visitors* into the city especially when local businesses needed a lift. There was also a strongly expressed view here that the Games helped to bring different communities in the city *closer together* – especially offering people with learning disabilities opportunities to have some 'mainstream' public attention, if only for a short time. The risk here, of course, is that the immediate impact of the Games will substitute, in the minds of the public, for more lasting, less attention-grabbing, structural mechanisms that are aimed at achieving similar, but more long-term, outcomes. These relative positives for Leicester also all seemed to survive really rather well over time, so they were still strongly identified by people from the Leicester area even six months after the Games had left the city. There was also a strong sense – perhaps especially in Phase 2 when the Games were taking place – that hosting the Games said something very positive about the city and its social

priorities, which also reflected well on the local public authorities, as these selected comments imply:

*'The Council is thinking of equality in investing in opportunities for everyone'*

*'[Special Olympics is] a boost for Leicester. Most people in Leicester are interested in knowing about it'*

*'It shows Leicester is kind & generous to people of all abilities. We are a city that promotes equality'*

*'Lovely for Council to do it for disabled people'*

*'Very good from [the] Leicester authority – a good advert for Leicester and relationships in Leicester'*

*'Wish they did more of this sort of thing – more than once a year'*

16.43 There were signs in the surveys that younger people and local people from BEM communities were slightly less supportive and less knowledgeable about the Games and learning disability – they certainly received less information on the event – than were older, white members of the local community. This group, it could be argued, more typically used 'traditional' local news and media sources for their information about local events. Perhaps the greater use of new technologies and new techniques for publicity purposes is important here? We also found that British Asians in Leicester were staunchly supportive of their own communities' role in supporting and understanding people with learning disabilities, even if public agencies are anxious that such issues are more 'hidden' in this specific section of the British population. It is also important to offer a general warning here about the likely greater difficulties in reaching some young people and making the issue of learning disability more relevant to their lives and immediate interests. Allied to this point there were complaints running through all the surveys that there was just *too little local advertising and promotion* of the 2009 Games. Had there been more and possibly more inventive and more targeted advertising, then it was claimed by some of our respondents that more local people would have tried to attend – though at some SO sports this would have proved impracticable. It may also be the case that some people simply remain 'immune' to publicity about certain types of events no matter how inventive or extensive the campaign.

16.44 There was, and there remains, some knowledge – but also plenty of confusion – among the Leicester public about the meaning of learning disability. The hosting of the Games was limited in its capacity to clear up this confusion. People in the Leicester surveys *anticipated* adding to their *knowledge and awareness* about learning disability during the Games, but this did not quite happen in the way some of them had probably hoped. This was partly, we have argued, because of the nature of most of the media coverage of the event, which did not dwell very much on the wider issues around the nature of learning disability and on the needs and available support for people with learning disabilities and their families.

16.45 Finally, we feel justified on the basis of the public surveys in once more describing Special Olympics Summer Games 2009 as a relative success for the city of Leicester and its people. It attracted very strong public support – if not very large numbers of active spectators – and it lifted the mood of the city and raised the profile of sport and learning disability in the Leicester area. It also showed many people in the region, who probably had their doubts, something of the real talent and capacities of people with learning disabilities, although some of the comments from members of the local public continue to plough the furrow of rather patronising sympathy for people with disabilities, which stresses passivity rather than action and some independence. ‘*Did they [people with learning disabilities] want to take part?*’ asked one of our street interviewees about the Games, before continuing: ‘*If so, it’s a good thing.*’ Much more, clearly, still needs to be done.

## 17. Some Reflections on SOL 2009 and the Games Legacy

17.1 So what lessons can Leicester, but also SOGB, usefully take from SOL 2009 regarding their respective roles in the hosting of the Games and in promoting its athletes and stimulating more national awareness about learning disability? Here, we flag up some of the legacy potential of 2009 in four specific areas:

*i) Changing public perceptions of people with learning disabilities*

*ii) The debate about Special Olympics National Summer Game and its legacy for athletes and families*

*iii) The host's legacy*

*iv) The SOGB legacy*

*i) Changing public perceptions of people with learning disabilities*

17.2 The Special Olympics GB National Summer Games in Leicester in 2009 offered a brief moment when the focus of the city (and, via TV, the regions of Britain) was on the sporting activities and lives of a small group of people with learning disabilities in the UK. In this report we have tried to examine the experience and impact of the Games for all those who took part. But Special Olympics must also be located within the wider context of discussions about provision and the public perceptions of those with a learning disability and we try to do some of that work here. Firstly, it will be beneficial if perceptions raised in Leicester and elsewhere by Special Olympics about people with learning disabilities were set in their more general contemporary context. In 2010, a nationwide poll found that discrimination against people with learning disabilities, as well as misconceptions about their lives, was widespread in the UK. This survey also suggested that there was a general lack of public knowledge about what constitutes a learning disability. Moreover, people with learning disabilities were often associated with negative rather than positive perceptions.<sup>225</sup> In addition, as Figure 17.1 illustrates, recent research from Mencap highlights the distinctive social and economic inequalities associated with learning disability. As indicated below, it is clear (though it is not much discussed) that

people with learning disabilities and their families continue to face very specific sorts of problems in relation to their public visibility, their general access to public and private space, and also in the various services they are offered – and often denied.

**Figure 17.1: Inequalities and Learning Disability**

- *Fewer than 1 in 5 people with a learning disability are in work (compared with 1 in 2 disabled people generally) but two-thirds want to work. Most are in low paid part-time jobs*
- *Only 1 in 3 people with a learning disability take part in some form of education or training*
- *Children with a learning disability are often socially excluded and 8 out of 10 are bullied*
- *1 in 2 families with a learning disabled child live in poverty*
- *Around half of all adults with a learning disability live in the family home, so don't have the same chances of independence or exercising choice as other people*
- *Less than one-third of adults with a learning disability have choice over who they live with and half have no choice about where they live*

**Source: Mencap website, 2009**

17.3 Evidence from the on-street surveys in Leicester that we conducted for this research suggests that the Games' impact on the *public's awareness* concerning people with learning disabilities was not insignificant. Six months after the event, more than one-third (34.6%) of all respondents felt that their awareness of learning disability had been *raised* by the Games. This figure had dropped from the pre-Games survey and is probably likely to drop again six months later. Any welcome legacy impact in this respect is, therefore, likely to be short-term, but we would contend it is still important. While the Leicester public claimed a high level of recognition of learning disability, there was also much confusion among them about its actual meaning and the disability's boundaries. There remains work to be done here. We also discovered that there were some noticeable differences between social groups in this respect, with younger people and those from BEM communities typically being rather less knowledgeable than others about



the Games and the precise meaning of learning disability. The question of working on the perceived *relevance* of disability in sport, especially to younger members of the general public, is one we have raised earlier in our discussions of the survey findings. Finding the appropriate mediums and language to reach younger people on disability issues should clearly be an important priority for SOGB and its partners, perhaps especially because competitive sport is so emblematic and so important for many young people today.

17.4 In addition to this, while many local people in Leicester had anticipated that the 2009 Games would add to their *knowledge and awareness* of learning disability, this did not happen in the way some had hoped or expected. But staff from the Leicester learning disability team had noticed a change in local ethnic minority communities regarding learning disability. Trish Branson, the experienced Service Manager in the Leicester City Council team, agreed for example that:

*We really know that among the Asian community in Leicester, in some families the person with a learning disability is in the back-room: they are not taken to family functions and are not included in the community because of the huge stigma.*<sup>226</sup>

But Yasmin Surti, Planning and Service Development Officer, had also noticed a slowly growing confidence among Asian people in the city following Special Olympics because of the highly public presence of learning disabled people in the city and the very positive way athletes and their families had been depicted in the media coverage of the Games. After all, she argues, ‘I suppose you can’t be ashamed of your son or daughter with a learning disability if they are sitting there with a gold medal.’<sup>227</sup> Surti argued that, because of Special Olympics, attitudes in Leicester’s Asian community had been positively affected:

*I think if you go back to the volunteers – to the different communities represented among the volunteers – that said a lot. It was unprecedented ... We have carers who are more vocal, more willing to stand up and be counted. [More willing] to acknowledge that they have a person with a learning disability [in the family] – and not just [acknowledge it] in the home. They’ve acquired more confidence, I think. We have a regional event coming around in November and one of our [Asian] carers is going to speak on the stage in front of 350 people ... So the legacy is really producing something.*<sup>228</sup>

17.5 How to build locally on this development is a key question. As Trish Branson points out, the Games also gave the Leicester Learning Disability Team – in the short term at least - more confidence to approach people concerning the disability issue, to knock on doors: *‘But ask me in six months time, and it might be different.’*<sup>229</sup> We have already discussed in this report post-Games ways of keeping the learning disability issue more strongly in the public eye and perhaps, therefore, of offering more public pressure to support new policy directives in this area. Leicester public’s awareness of learning disability was arguably already reasonably high before 2009, and this may have been partly due to the city having staged the Games previously, in 1989. If so, this would give further credence to the difficulty in measuring legacy in this respect. However, we can say that, six months after the Leicester Games, 84% of the public sample in and around Leicester thought it was good to have had the *opportunity to mix* with people with learning disabilities and 65.3% thought that the Games had brought disabled and non-disabled people in the city *‘closer together’*. There was also widespread approval for the way the Games had ‘boosted’ the city and its reputation and how it was perceived to have offered opportunities for people with learning disabilities to ‘join in’, to be part of the wider society in a way which was meaningful to our respondents. There are real challenges in this area, but the impressive ‘My Sporting Hero’ publicity campaign for SOL (see 5.5) provided pointers on how some selected Special Olympics athletes could perhaps be more strongly promoted by SOGB and others as regional and even nationally known role models aimed at younger people – for example in the way that Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson has been so brilliantly effective for physically disabled sportsmen and women in the UK. As we have pointed out, our public survey results also suggested that the Leicester public thought that the Games had brought able-bodied and disabled people ‘closer together’, but this view was probably based more on hope than on any reliable prima facie evidence. But how best can the ‘one-off’ impact of the Games be used to extend this sort of perceived integration into more everyday contexts? The structural exclusions of people with learning disabilities are unlikely to be much dislodged by Special Olympics, but the media and the Games together can be important potential allies in shifting wider public perceptions. Media engagement with SOL 2009 thus offers significant promise for the future.

### *Media Coverage*

17.6 While our data suggest that the Games made relatively little significant impact on wider understandings of what actually constitutes learning disability, this may have been partially a result of how the Games were *mediated*. SOL 2009 enjoyed widespread media coverage at both local and national levels and the media is one of the most important agencies in shaping wider perceptions of people with learning difficulties. In this sense, the language and discourses used – especially by the local and regional media – to describe people with learning disabilities can strongly influence the Games legacy or perhaps – with reference to SOL 2009 – it can help perpetuate dominant assumptions and attitudes. Again, it is difficult to measure how deep and how lasting an impression the media coverage of the Games made on the wider public. But we would stress that what is said, but perhaps especially *how* it is said, is likely to have a considerable framing impact on the public's views of disability.

17.7 The impact of the mediation of this issue is not restricted, of course, to the more 'traditional' media, such as newspapers and television. It also includes the internet, advertising and other promotional techniques. Indeed, the relative *lack of effective local publicity* around the 2009 Games – which might have increased the awareness of the Games and of learning disability – received much comment and criticism from the Leicester public. While the more traditional media generally worked hard at being very 'positive' in their depiction of the Games and its athletes, it is sometimes difficult to strike a balance between supportive media coverage and the real risk of patronizing athletes as competitors. This is because of the type of language, idioms and gestures sometimes used by commentators and reporters in discussing the Games, which are based on established popular assumptions about how the non-disabled public should respond to people with a learning disability.

17.8 Certainly, the media emphasis on what we have called the 'human-interest' stories around the Games tended to exacerbate tendencies towards 'overly-sentimental' forms of journalism, and this sort of coverage was sometimes compounded by the reductive qualities of television.

In pointing this out, however, we also want to praise journalists and broadcasters for their work in offering a strong media profile for the Games. But we would suggest that when such professionals are assigned to cover sporting events involving people with learning disabilities, some form of training might be in order to ensure some basic understanding of the disability agenda, of the people involved, and of the sorts of approaches and language which might be more appropriate. Perhaps this training could be similar to that offered to and undertaken by many of the SO volunteers as part of their pre-Games preparation. Games athlete Lee Penfold's internship at Central TV after the Games has certainly contributed to this process of raising awareness in the local media about the use of language and the appropriate coverage of future learning disability events and it provides a very positive pointer for the future and the importance of 'schooling' the media in this area. There were certainly signs that Central TV had learned some useful lessons from their Games coverage, via the work of the ITV Central Diversity Advisory Panel; the acid test, of course, is putting such lessons into practice.<sup>230</sup>

## *ii) The debate about Special Olympics National Summer Games & its legacy for athletes & families*

17.9 According to our data, for the athletes and families SOL 2009 was a success story. It provided a national stage for healthy competition and personal development and, at the social level, the opportunity to make new friendships and renew old ones. But to what extent did SOL 2009 provide a lasting legacy for the athletes and one which might break down some barriers around this disability? Before examining the potential role of Special Olympics in promoting greater social inclusion, we need to place it in the wider context of leisure and learning disability. Leisure – and the consumption of leisure – is important in shaping social and individual identities. In this sense Special Olympics, with its year-round training programme, plays an important role in providing leisure opportunities and developing the identity of people with learning disabilities as both athletes and citizens. Traditionally, disabled people have fewer friends drawn from a narrow range of contacts than the non-disabled so expanding the

provision of leisure opportunities that also extend personal horizons can also be important in this regard.

17.10 Over the past 30 years or so the Special Olympics movement has grown both domestically and around the world. Today, Special Olympics GB has been championed as ‘a matter not just of leisure provision, but of equality of opportunity and social justice.’<sup>231</sup> In 2009 the city of Leicester attempted to host Special Olympics as they would any other major sporting event and, for once – and despite its shortcomings – people with learning disabilities received some press and regional television coverage for their sporting skills and achievements rather than for the barriers they usually face. However, local and regional press coverage had its limitations (see above) and national newspapers did not typically carry extended features in their sporting sections about Special Olympics in 2009. Moreover, its critics continue to argue – despite our survey findings – that Special Olympics risks *perpetuating* inequalities and divisions between the disabled and non-disabled. We need to address and reflect on these claims, briefly, here.

17.11 A long-term proponent of this critical view is Keith Storey from Touro University in California in the United States. Focussing his research on America, Storey argues that the SO programme and philosophy has the effect of continuing the old, derided 1960s’ policy of segregating the disabled from the non-disabled, instead of pursuing policies of increasing integration (The same could be said, of course of Paralympics). This is no extreme or isolated view. Although Leicester’s Learning Disabilities Partnership was involved in the decision to host the Games in the city there remained local divisions on this score, and one of Leicester’s own learning disabilities advisors echoed this ‘opposing’ position to us just before the Games took place:

*I’m not sure Special Olympics – or ‘special’ anything – is the way we should be going ... Special Olympics is actually taking us back down a road that we have been trying to move along, which is that we’re not ‘special’; we want the same things as everybody else. Yes, we do want you to do it in a slightly different way for us. But I think the whole Special Olympics ethos is around difference, it’s not around inclusion.*<sup>232</sup>

17.12 In the same vein, Storey contends that the sort of ‘segregation’ offered by Special Olympics provides no real choices for disabled people and it risks reinforcing negative stereotyping of people with learning disabilities and perpetuating very real barriers between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Storey also argues that Special Olympics in the United States is ineffective in providing ‘quality of life outcomes’ and that the exchanges that occur between severely disabled people and others at events such as the SO National Summer Games do not typically *reduce* prejudice, and they can even worsen it. He goes on:

*Social interactions that do occur between persons with or without disabilities at the Special Olympics are likely to be short term (a brief meeting between the volunteer and the person with a severe disability) and unlikely to develop into friendships or social networks ... [S]uperficial and casual interactions such as those that occur in the Special Olympics between persons with or without severe disabilities do not lead to a reduction in prejudice and may actually reinforce negative stereotyping.*<sup>233</sup>

17.13 Storey further argues that the hours and days per week spent training for Special Olympics do *not* lead to important skill acquisition and that time for what he calls ‘functional activities’ is lost because of its dominance in the lives of athletes. Because children and adults often compete together in the same events in the Games, he further argues that involvement in Special Olympics risks infantilising adults who have a learning disability rather than presenting them as fully-fledged adult members of society, or as friends or potential employees, etc. This may be one reason, too, why only one member (out of 36) of the 2008 Special Olympics international board of directors was identified by Storey as having a learning disability. Finally, Storey claims that involvement in Special Olympics too often encourages a rather patronising and infantilising ‘hugging’ mentality towards athletes and other people with a learning disability among those who organise, support and spectate at the Games. He suggests here that society’s response to people with disabilities mediated through events such as SO is largely emotionally driven; one which means that the non-disabled majority are invited to admire the ‘humbling’, against-the-odds ‘bravery’ or ‘determination’ of people with learning disabilities, more than they are their real talents and skills as athletes or ‘ordinary’ (and, like everyone else, flawed)

people.<sup>234</sup> Keith Storey concludes that ‘segregated’ sports programmes like Special Olympics cannot be reformed, so they must be replaced – by properly resourced strategies for more inclusive recreational leisure and sport.<sup>235</sup>

17.14 This is a challenging critique and one that must be addressed. We have already suggested that some prevailing media discourses and public responses around Special Olympics in 2009 probably *did* encourage what Storey calls the ‘hugging mentality’, both in deed and in word. The language used to us, in fieldwork, in interviews and in questionnaires, and used in the popular press in 2009, *was* on occasions rather patronising (and divisive) because of its talk about the ‘inspiring’ and ‘courageous’ actions of ‘they’ and ‘them.’ Much still needs to change here, though there are also early signs that this could be happening at the regional level partly because of the impact of SOL 2009.<sup>236</sup> There is also a case, we would concede, for recognising the often transient nature of the contact made between people with learning disabilities and those without obvious disability at Special Olympics Summer Games. How many new volunteers in Leicester in 2009 will continue to work in this specific area or will have real, lasting friendships with people who have disabilities as a result of their work at the Games? This remains an important question and we wonder later, even though 50% of all volunteers for SOL vowed they would volunteer again in the future,<sup>237</sup> whether enough was done after the Games to keep new volunteers engaged specifically in the world of disability sport or in work with people who have learning disabilities?

17.15 But we would also argue that Storey understates the importance of the longer term relationships which *are* established – and which were very apparent in Leicester – between coaches, delegations heads, local volunteers, supporters and SO athletes, and the fact that many regionally-based volunteers for the 2009 Games were actually already experienced workers with people with learning disabilities. Their connections and commitment in this respect seem far from short-term or contingent. In addition, far from being ineffective in providing ‘quality of life outcomes’ it is quite clear to us that members of families of athletes felt strongly that they and their athlete relatives *did* benefit from involvement in Special

Olympic competition. Indeed, in this respect randomised empirical research studies in Canada suggest something very different from the conclusions reached by Storey. They argue that, 'The more athletes participate in [Special Olympics] competitions, from local to international level events, the more positive their general self-worth.'<sup>238</sup>

17.16 Of course, to what extent lasting social relationships can, and do, extend *outside* these small event circles and into wider society, thus leaving a more pronounced and more long-lasting legacy, is difficult to judge. We must concede that this was unlikely to be a widespread effect from SOL 2009 given: the relatively small number of the general public who attended the Leicester Games; the nature of media coverage of SOL 2009 which tended to re-affirm (as much as challenge) some conventional stereotypes; and the relative lack of any sophisticated post-Games plan or scheme to use new volunteers strategically in the arena of learning disability, or to integrate Special Olympics athletes into the wider community. One exception here was perhaps the occupational experience in the media, later, of Games Ambassador and local athlete Lee Penfold.<sup>239</sup>

17.17 Academic supporters of Special Olympics in the USA, such as Carolyn Hughes and Meghan McDonald, have similarly responded to the Storey critique by pointing out that we rarely question the loss of time for 'functional activities' because of training in the case of non-disabled athletes, and that crucially Special Olympics has important *social*, as well as sporting, functions for those involved. These include promoting physical fitness, social skills, and access to positive public reinforcers during sporting competition.<sup>240</sup> The Healthy Athletes programme, which was prominent in Leicester in 2009 (see 17.23), is perhaps especially significant here.<sup>241</sup> Moreover, attempting the integration of people with severe learning disabilities into mainstream recreational activities – as Storey suggests – without costly appropriate support and accompanying education, could be disastrous and counterproductive to all involved. Given the lack of current alternatives, Special Olympics *can* help prepare people with a learning disability to qualify for more integrated sporting competition.<sup>242</sup> In fact, Unified Sports, as part of the wider Special Olympics programme, do bring people with learning disabilities and people



without them, working closely together in sporting competition (see 17.28). They did so in the Leicester Games in 2009, in the sailing events, for example.

17.18 Notwithstanding the occasional slightly patronizing accounts of their abilities, our research has also emphasised how participation in a competitive environment can help to challenge common assumptions amongst the general public about the ‘passive’ nature of people with learning disabilities. In the same way, Michael Berube, a father of a boy with Down’s Syndrome, discovered that his son enjoyed a ‘real’ challenge after he began competing in Special Olympics swimming (in America), describing him as having ‘a fierce competitive streak’. Berube recently compared his realisation of his son’s potential with the popular perception of people with learning disabilities:

*After all, I’ve long since grown immune to most of the clichés about children with Down’s Syndrome. Jamie is not angel sent to humanise the rest of us; not a sweet little dollop of smiles and passivity. He is an ordinary human being, full of passions and desires that are at once admirable, dangerous, contradictory and utopian.<sup>243</sup>*

17.19 As Berube so effectively points out there is a tendency to both idealise and patronise people with learning disabilities and sport can have a rather ambivalent role – at best – in challenging such tendencies. Closer to home, Nick Townsend is chair of trustees for Self Unlimited, which offers independent living opportunities for people with learning disabilities in Leicestershire. His family has been involved in work in this area for 40 years and he has 10 years experience of his own in the voluntary sector on learning disability. His family motivation for this work is that he has a brother with Down’s Syndrome. Townsend was someone drawn from local disability organisations who was on the SOL Board and he was a member of the finance sub-committee which faced the difficult task of producing reliable funding for the Games as the economic crisis developed. It was Townsend who helped find the funds for the 2009 Games Closing Ceremony when no money was available to support it. Like Michael Berube, he has little doubt about the wider benefit of Special Olympics for athletes:

*The benefits [of Special Olympics] for people with learning disabilities are self-evident in terms of independence, which we are trying to promote as part of the philosophy of our*

*charity. [We are] giving people more opportunities for independent living and the confidence to be independent, because most of them have not been supported. If they are given the opportunity to go out and achieve things, whether it is in the workplace, creative activities, or sport, this [Special Olympics] is a great self-educator, which gives people a great amount of confidence.*<sup>244</sup>

17.20 Despite Special Olympics' problems, we broadly agree with Townsend, but also with Hughes and McDonald, that much more education and training about disability and policies of inclusion is required in mainstream cultural and sporting arenas in the UK, for both participants and providers. This applies strongly to Leicester in the wake of hosting the 2009 Games. This will help make for better pathways toward more sporting integration in the longer-term for people with a learning disability in the city. This development must also include new forms of marketing and communication aimed at promoting opportunities for inclusion in a positive 'can do' environment. But until then, our view is that – for all of its obvious limitations – Special Olympics *does* provide a meaningful and important activity – physically, socially and intellectually – for those involved. And our public surveys suggest that the Games can also have some potentially progressive impact concerning perceptions of learning difficulty on those who simply *observe* the Games, even from some distance.

17.21 Even today in the UK, people with learning disabilities are often 'hidden' from public view and they experience forms of inequality which are often masked. Events such as Special Olympics briefly provide people with such disabilities and their families and friends with an important public stage to reaffirm their self-worth and display their talents as athletes. These are, undeniably, meaningful and frequently joyful occasions – much professional sport is anxiety provoking and miserable. Many severely disabled people would almost certainly be unable to compete at all in any other sporting arena other than this one. People in the Leicester Learning Disability Team, such as Service Manager Trish Branson, who work daily for the greater integration of people with a learning disability are also best described as sophisticated and reflexive pragmatists with regards to Special Olympics:

*We want people [with learning disabilities] to be part of their communities but I don't think society is ready to treat people equally ... We still use the medical model [in the UK]. If your child is not 'normal' it tends to be: 'Oh dear, I am sorry', rather than a celebration of a child's abilities. Special Olympics needs to change in the future, but it is as it is at the moment, so let's embrace it.*<sup>245</sup>

17.22 Special Olympics Summer Games also offers hosting cities, such as Leicester, a real chance to demonstrate their own commitment towards the disabled and to promote the city and its people effectively. Large majorities of the respondents in our public survey were in favour of Leicester investing in such events and they thought that the Games had been a 'boost' for the city and had had a positive effect on the city's national image. Part of the legacy of hosting Special Olympics should be using these sentiments to promote more public knowledge about the learning disabled and more integrated facilities for their use, as well as offering a better deal in terms of the public profile of people with learning disabilities and improvements in general facilities and services. We see no necessary tensions between these longer-term goals and support for a reforming Special Olympics.

### *Health Legacy*

17.23 Perhaps a more pressing concern regarding the benefits of sport and Special Olympics is that of the *health* of the SO athletes – both physical and mental. The right to good health has become a pillar of modern day citizenship but research regarding the health of people with learning disabilities is very revealing. In 2007 a Mencap report, *Death by Indifference*, highlighted the fact that many people with learning disabilities die unnecessarily prematurely because they do not receive the right treatment or care early enough. More people with learning disabilities are now living in the community, often with fewer people around to offer support, and this can lead to a lack of basic health care, such as personal hygiene, having regular dental appointments, and checking that shoes are comfortable. In addition, people with learning disabilities suffer from higher levels of obesity due to a lack of exercise, which is partly attributable to wider perceptions of them as passive and unable to think or act for themselves.

After conducting research into the matter, Special Olympics International became aware of the unacceptable lack of quality health care available in this area. It contended that people with learning disabilities had a 40 per cent greater risk for certain health issues and that health care professionals were not typically trained, or experienced, in caring for people with learning disabilities. In 2000, Special Olympics International established its own worldwide Healthy Athletes Programme.<sup>246</sup>

17.24 Our research on athletes' general health during SOL 2009 confirmed some of the difficulties in this area. Evidence gathered from health care professionals involved in delivering the Healthy Athletes Programme at Leicester revealed a relative lack of focus on some basic health care needs for people with learning disabilities. At the Games Village, for example, optometrists related that a high proportion of those athletes screened in eye tests needed spectacles. As many Special Olympics athletes don't read, it seems that some carers might assume that poor eyesight is not an especially important problem to be monitored or addressed among athletes. Similar attitudes prevail regarding hearing, claim audiologists. As part of the 2009 screening one athlete was presumed to have had a loss of hearing, but under examination the athlete was found to have a bead stuck in an ear. Podiatrists uncovered similar stories. For example, some people with learning disabilities have problems with their feet because of issues connected to their disability. But these can be exacerbated by life-style factors relating to low income and, again, relative lack of care. For instance, some athletes wear trainers much or all of the time, which can lead to sweaty feet and then athlete's foot, which often goes unnoticed. Other problems are caused by 'hand-me down' shoes that don't always fit properly.

17.25 Special Olympics could be an important way of getting over a much stronger message about basic health needs especially to those who care for people with learning disabilities. The Healthy Athletes Programme is already having a direct practical impact in this respect, but it needs to have a much stronger profile inside and outside the duration of the Games. The obvious connections between sport and health for people with learning difficulties need to be

stressed more acutely, and more research in this arena is needed to establish the real impact of disability sport on the health of those involved. The wider benefits for health of sport and physical activity have been well chronicled since a 1953 landmark study by Jerry White *et al* which established a positive link between exercise and health.<sup>247</sup> Sport, as a form of physical activity, can have beneficial impact on health, especially for people with learning disabilities. For example, athletes usually have better blood pressure levels than those people with learning disabilities who do not take part in sport. While the health levels differ between relaxed sports, such as bowling, and more vigorous sports which involve more cardio-vascular exercise, sport generally provides other benefits. A parent of a young man with cerebral palsy told us how, because of his Special Olympics training for Leicester, his fitness and co-ordination had improved to such an extent his physical problems were now hardly noticeable. Another praised Special Olympics coaching for helping with his improving balance. These are clear benefits that can be transferred into everyday life when performing daily tasks; thus sport here can have real life-changing consequences. Moreover, the physical benefits of sport have traditionally been linked to mental well-being and are summed up in the phrase: 'a healthy mind in a healthy body.'

17.26 On a wider level, in terms of the impact of the Games on improving general health care provision and access and promoting the greater public visibility of people in Leicester with learning disabilities over the longer term, Trish Branson had noticed a possible change in local attitudes, and some new doors opening in the medical profession for her Leicester Learning Disability Team. She told us:

*By having Special Olympics here we had a consultant from the Leicester Royal Infirmary leading on health checks. Fantastic! Instead of us [the Learning Disability Team] having to knock on their doors saying, 'How are you going to keep people healthy?' and 'What are you going to do about it?' they were knocking on our door, as if it was: 'What should we be doing?' So, in fact, [it was] turning it around. So now we know that the health profile of people with learning disabilities is higher [in Leicester]. It [the National Games] has certainly had an impact.<sup>248</sup>*

17.27 Connecting up, in this way, the impact of the Games with the daily experience of people with learning disabilities in Leicester shows what can be achieved by host cities. In addition to the health benefits that it can bring, another continuing legacy of Special Olympics in the wider sense is that involvement in sport can offer greater meaning and a purpose to an individual's life and existence. Sport can improve confidence and raise self-esteem, and in this sense, people can – and do – derive 'psychic income' from sport. This is no different for people with learning disabilities as it is to the 'regular' recreational athlete. As one parent of a Special Olympics athlete succinctly put it to us: 'the event itself is very important indeed; it gives the athletes a sense of purpose and of ... being.' Clinical research in North America strongly suggests that involvement in Special Olympics clearly boosts the self-worth of those involved.<sup>249</sup>

### *Sporting Legacy*

17.28 To what extent did SOL 2009 leave a distinctive *sporting* legacy in which access and sporting provision improved for Special Olympic athletes following July 2009? Again, it is probably too early to judge if there has been a significant impact in this area, and where we have found evidence of some legacy it has been patchy. First, SOL 2009, through the sailing regatta, offered evidence of Unified Sports, which as part of the wider Special Olympics programme, bring people with learning disabilities and people without them, working together in competition. They are still a very small part of Special Olympics – and they need to grow. Understandably, many Special Olympics athletes may not want to be part of these unified sports developments. Why would they want to give the up the sense of competition and 'community' that Special Olympics offers?

17.29 Attitudes towards people with learning disabilities among staff at sporting facilities in Leicester were affected by the Games according to Justin Hammond, Project Manager in the Leicester Learning Disability Team. The outcomes here were positive, he thought – though after the Games the Team still had to find funds for sporting events in Leicester leisure centres which were specifically provided for people with learning disabilities.<sup>250</sup> At least a couple of months after the Leicester Games, local sports staff were still enjoying the 'warm glow' of the Games,

but the down side was in the way the impact of the Games also produced an unexpected challenge to local sports employers in terms of staff motivation:

*I was at the swimming all week [of the Games]. I saw a different attitude in the people who worked at the pool before the [Special] Olympics and during the Olympics, and I know the manager there had real problems motivating her group after the Olympics, because they had enjoyed them so much. They found their day jobs quite boring after that. I think the leisure staff who had worked on Special Olympics would have a different attitude to a person with a learning difficulty coming through their doors after the Games. I think you can see that: it was too big. Seeing the Olympians and family reactions, you could not avoid being changed by it.<sup>251</sup>*

17.30 One sporting legacy from the Games is that some athletes with learning disabilities, after gaining some proficiency in their chosen sport via Special Olympics, can and do join regular sports clubs. Some athletes interviewed as part of the Legacy project have since joined football, tennis and power-lifting clubs, for example. Success in Special Olympics has given them the confidence to overcome some of the barriers to mainstream participation. However, these are just a tiny sample of the 8,000-plus athletes currently in the Special Olympics programme. Learning disability covers a wide range of impairments: some learning disabled athletes are able to develop the skills necessary to take part in mainstream sport, either independently or with appropriate support. But for the vast majority, and especially those whose disabilities are multiple and profound, the barriers at the moment are still virtually insurmountable. Talking of the 2009 MATP event, for example, Trish Branson argued that the venue organizers in Leicester had had, ‘a real wake-up call’ regarding questions of access and the nature of their facilities because of the levels of severe disability involved. ‘It meant changing their thinking *totally*.’ Justin Hammond also thought that the personal – but also the wider *public* – impact of MATP was likely to be considerable: ‘We had a number of family carers who never thought their children would achieve anything and they saw something dramatically different; that then changes what they say to others.’ MATP had certainly had an impact on those producing TV coverage about the Games, but how long would this positive impression of severely disabled competitors last among the wider public?

17.31 Secondly, in June 2009 the inaugural Inclusive Youth Games for Leicestershire and Rutland took place in Loughborough. It attracted some 350 disabled and non-disabled athletes aged from 5-19 years in seven selected activities.<sup>252</sup> The second Inclusive Games took place in the same location in June 2010. Did SOL 2009 have any impact this time? Commenting on this issue Kate Scott (Leicestershire's Schools Sport Development Officer), said the 2009 Games had had little effect athlete-wise despite its 'huge success'. Most of the participants from the Inclusive Games were those on the SEN registers in mainstream schools and those with moderate or severe learning disabilities in special schools. In addition, these games are aligned to the national governing bodies of sport rather than SOGB. This situation highlights further the complexities in the range of provision of sport for people with learning disabilities. However, Scott states that the Youth Games work with as many partners as possible to increase the opportunities available. This has entailed establishing contact with various Special Olympic groups in the county in order to link its curriculum activities to community clubs. Scott explained that she was involved in a disability athletics group that included representatives from the local county athletics association and they were trying to link up with the local Special Olympics athletics club. The aim here was to support both the SO movement and local athletes so that they would have more opportunities to participate in future Special Olympic Games.<sup>253</sup> This seems to be a positive legacy of the 2009 Games. However, it is not known to what extent there are similar developments across the country and this example highlights the 'permissive' nature of learning disability sport more generally.

17.32 A third potentially significant sporting legacy of SOL 2009 has been the introduction in Leicester of the Special Olympics Young Athletes Programme. This involves three-to-eight year old children with learning disabilities in special schools across the city of Leicester. The Young Athletes Programme seeks to strengthen physical development and self-esteem for children by building their skills for future sports participation and by socialisation prior to Special Olympics competition eligibility, which can begin from the age of eight. The programme is designed for families to play with their young athletes at home and is also appropriate for pre-schools,



schools and playgroups to use with small groups of young children with and without intellectual disabilities.<sup>254</sup> Within the Young Athletes Programme there are two specific levels of play:

- Level One comprises physical activities focused on developing fundamental motor skills, tracking and hand-eye coordination.
- Level Two builds on these basic skills and concentrates on the application of Level One activities and also focuses on developing these skills to a level consistent with entry to official Special Olympics sports.

17.33 One of the key features of Young Athletes is the use of equipment which is designed specifically for children with learning disabilities. One local sports coach Rachel Duncan, explained how she knew very little about learning disabilities before the Young Athletes Programme developed.<sup>255</sup> Initially she found the work quite challenging but, for her, working with children with learning disabilities eventually became much more rewarding than working with other children. At the start of the programme, Duncan described how a few children wouldn't even come into the sports hall but after a few weeks they were joining in.<sup>256</sup> She observed how some of those children involved have developed, for example, from not just kicking a football but looking to see *where* they are going to kick it.

17.34 The Young Athletes Programme (YAP) had been initiated by Special Olympics International in the spring of 2009. On 26 July, during SOL 2009, it had its European launch at West Gate School in Leicester with the Special Olympics International President Tim Shriver and Linda, his wife, in attendance. It had been co-ordinated locally by Steve White, an SOL Board member and chairperson of Leicester Sports and Physical Activity Alliance, with the support of Leicester City Council and local schools. West Gate had also been involved in the SAQ (Sport, Agility, Quickness) programme and so Young Athletes fed into the work that the school was already doing.<sup>257</sup> The Young Athletes Programme was being used in the city of Leicester, prior to being extended into other European countries, starting with Ireland and Poland. In addition to this, on 25 September 2010, YAP staged an event on the first Eunice Kennedy Shriver Day.

White also hopes to establish a centre dedicated to the sporting needs of people with learning disabilities, with the proposed name of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Centre, on a school site in Leicester. However, this ambitious vision has yet to achieve viable funding and it would need careful planning and resourcing to become a realistic goal. But if it reaches fruition it could yet provide a lasting and tangible legacy of SOL 2009.

17.35 Of course, these potential sporting legacies can serve to re-open debates again concerning the utility of 'separate' provision for sport for people with learning disabilities. But within Special Olympics there is a network of support, carers and specially trained coaches who make participation possible for people whose level of support requirements would be too great for most mainstream sporting clubs to provide and whose other members may lack the patience and understanding to make adjustments themselves. Integration might be a long-term aim, but it is one that seems relatively distant at this stage, at least for some SO athletes and there is no guarantee at all that it would provide more opportunities for people with learning disabilities. Special Olympics, for some of the 8,000 athletes out of around 1.2 million UK people with learning disabilities, might provide a first step towards that goal and in doing so it can – and does – change lives. We look next at the wider question of the local impact of the Games for people with learning disabilities, for local staff and volunteers, and for the general population of Leicester.

### *iii) The hosts' legacy*

17.36 Here we look at the role of the hosts and ask about the legacy for Leicester from SO 2009, but also at what future potential host cities can learn from the experience of SOL. The main point to make here is that future hosts should be very clearly informed about *all* that is required to host the Games: in terms of necessary facilities; staff development and support; marketing and promotion; and, of course, prospects for the financing of the Games. What follows is an examination of some of these issues.

### *Games Finances*

17.37 The financial troubles of SOL 2009 have been well documented here and elsewhere. It should be pointed out, however, that, despite the financial difficulties of the Leicester Games, private sponsorship for general Special Olympics activities remains alive and crucial. In October 2010, it was announced that National Grid had been awarded the inaugural global *Beyond Sport* award for its sponsorship of Special Olympics activities, a considerable honour and powerful recognition of its work. There was also strong cross-party support for the 2009 Games on the Leicester City Council and from the Leicestershire County Council. This support stayed solid from the bidding process through the financial downturn to the actual staging of the Games, though this may have been partly because of the assumed links between Special Olympics and London 2012. Nevertheless, in light of the possibilities of financial problems dogging future Games it is clearly important that future hosts can count on this sort of unilateral, cross-party political support over an extended period.<sup>258</sup> Part of Leicester's legacy for 2009 involves learning lessons – and passing these on – from the Games funding crisis. In August 2010 a Leicester City Council cross-party review panel which investigated the Games' financial arrangements blamed no individual for the funding problems and it was accepted in its report that all reasonable efforts had been made to obtain commercial sponsorship, although the panel was noticeably reticent on the question of whether the hope of raising £3 million in corporate sponsorship in a worsening economic climate was realistic. It suggested that to prop up the Games and avert the need for the City Council to give an extra £1 million in funding – with a supplement from the County Council – the cost of hosting the event might have been more evenly spread across the East Midlands region, though we are unsure that this kind of 'regional' branding for the Games would have been either possible or effective. In addition, the panel argued that the event should have had better and earlier planning and should have had an 'improved financial risk assessment.' The report suggested, finally, that central government funding should be provided to local authorities wishing to host similar learning disability events.<sup>259</sup>

17.38 We agree, of course, that the Leicester organizers should have had much more time to raise the necessary funds to finance the Games – which means that SOGB should announce the

host city rather more than two years in advance of the Games being hosted. Ideally the next hosts should be announced as, or before, the previous Games conclude. This could actually be a positive legacy outcome from the Games' funding crisis in 2009. But we are also of the view that *First Rights* spent too much of the little time they had at their disposal in assuming sufficient funding was going to result from approaches to a few major sponsors of London 2012. The potential unique attractions of this possible commercial synergy between Special Olympics and the London Games seemed to mask obvious problems in linking the two events. Spreading brand value across major events in this way is not typical in the sporting arena and, despite its title, Special Olympics also has a strictly limited relationship, at best, with the Olympic Games.

17.39 But the fact that the 2012 Olympic Games were to be held in Britain for the first time since 1948 probably raised rather unrealistic hopes concerning public branding and sponsorship income, especially when very positive noises initially came from some of the 2012 sponsors. These were only drowned out by LOCOG very late in the process. SOGB seemed sceptical, but also intrigued, by the possibilities here, and thus SOL was allowed to pursue this single possible funding stream almost beyond the point of no return. Indeed, by the time it was clear that key London 2012 sponsors were *not* able to support Special Olympics 2009 it probably *was* too late to explore other major or collaborative funding options. As Nick Townsend on SOL's finance sub-committee put it, Leicester's 'Plan B' – using personal contacts with local and regional businesses – was put into operation only in February 2009, in the very trough of recession and just six months before the Games were due to begin. Anticipating that one major sponsor would eventually come on board had made it impossible to sell off other rights before this date. What might have initially seemed to the organizers, and especially to SOL's agents, to be the path of least resistance and greatest potential rewards in terms of the funding question for the 2009 Games turned out, in fact, to be its major stumbling block. Lessons should be learned by all concerned – and more constructive support and advice should be offered by SOGB to future hosts.

17.40 The Leicester City Council's cross-party review panel's point about possible central government funding for the Summer Games may seem to some to be a touch naïve in light of the current financial climate and the cuts that have recently been imposed across the public sector in the UK. People with learning disabilities are unlikely to be regarded as a special case in this respect and Sport England is likely to continue to look to its governing bodies to provide for learning disability sport. However, consideration of the financial problems that Leicester experienced were, in themselves, an important legacy for Special Olympics, and they do raise the question of how future Games will be – and should be – funded. Regarding this question, the SOL finance sub-committee meeting on 18 December 2009 argued, conclusively, that 'The Games are not sustainable in its present format'.<sup>260</sup> We agree with their view. Certainly, cities the size of Leicester are likely to look very critically at the prospect of bidding to host the Games if it continues to prove difficult to raise cash from major sponsors in what might be a deteriorating, or at best a flat-lining, economic climate.

17.41 However, in its plans for the proposed 2013 Games SOGB still state plainly in their 'guidance' on finances for hosts that the Games should be 'self-financing'. Is this realistic? It certainly raises the question of whether this is a suitable or appropriate approach to the funding question and what role, if any, SOGB itself and other agencies should play in raising public and private sector finance in support of future Games. Why should the burden of risk fall so entirely on the hosts, especially as Special Olympics so obviously lacks some of the commercial potential of other major sporting events? This issue also raises further complex questions, of course, about the relationship between the concept of Special Olympics and more mainstream sports funding provision for people with learning disabilities in the UK. There would be plenty of barriers to overcome – for example, accommodating the important *participation* ethos of Special Olympics – but a more effective integration of Special Olympics into the UK sporting mainstream could provide more opportunities for more athletes and may also help to address some of the fundamental structural and funding issues we have outlined above.

17.42 At the very least, the funding difficulties of 2009 make it highly advisable that any future hosts be made completely aware of the status of Special Olympics and its precise relationship with the IOC and the Olympics Games (both summer and winter), especially regarding the question of sponsorship rights and constraints. In other words, because of legal and commercial reasons it is highly unlikely that Special Olympics will ever be able to derive substantial sponsorship support from funders directly connected to the IOC and the Olympic Games. Indeed, although athletes and families appreciate the Olympics branding, one of the SOL Board members told us:

*I'm not sure we [SOL] got any advantages from calling it "Olympics". Call it the National Sporting Games for People with Learning Disabilities and you might get a national movement going, without the "Olympics" tag.*

Special Olympics athletes and also their families do get a thrill, of course, from the 'Olympics' connection and this branding clearly does have some future value. But, certainly, rather than chasing large sponsorship funds from such global multi-national corporations, more consideration should now be given to new funding strategies and/or local or national companies. In particular, these strategies could be aimed at building up a larger raft of committed sponsors who might join the National Grid and others, and also may be drawn upon for Games funding at four-yearly intervals. In addition to this, local sponsors might also be better placed for working in tandem with hosts to provide a more integrated and 'rooted' Games for that local community and host cities might be advised that some local (or national) public funding for the Games is very likely to be required in future.

#### *Sporting infrastructure, Opening Ceremony & Games publicity*

17.43 Three further key areas concerning legacy questions that emerged from the week of competition in Leicester were: debates about the sporting *infrastructure* needed to host future Special Olympics National Summer Games; the existing *structure* of the Games Opening Ceremony; and the *publicity* required to effectively promote events of this character and scale. We consider each of these in turn below.

17.44 Hosting 21 sports in 21 different venues in the city of Leicester in July 2009 may have seemed like a glorious opportunity to spread widely the local impact of the Games, and this had some positive effects. But it also offered serious administrative and logistical challenges to members of staff who were already highly stretched. It also sent out confusing messages to some potential local spectators in Leicester about which venues were, and were not, accessible to the local public and restricted prospects for SO athletes to make contacts across sports. Some rationalization of venue spaces is probably advisable for future Games for logistical and administrative purposes and it would also allow athletes in different sports the bonus of more opportunities to mix and exchange. We collected evidence that some competitors and their families were a little isolated by the one-sport-one-venue arrangements and felt inconvenienced by the limited designated available transport between venues and accommodation centres during the week of the Games in Leicester. A more integrated and more compact games, perhaps with a loop transport service of sorts between a reduced number of venues, would also help create a more inclusive atmosphere by binding the different locations for sports more closely together and by allowing more mobility for athletes and families. Again, lack of finance probably played a part here in restricting transport arrangements.

17.45 In addition to these points about transport and venues, other hosts (and Leicester itself) can learn from the city's experience of the 'grand' occasions of the 2009 Games. The showpiece events of Special Olympics must keep their 'wow' factor, but they must also have the welfare of the athletes and spectators strongly at heart. The Games *Opening Ceremony* in Leicester was hugely impressive, but it was also cumbersome and slow in its organization and delivery, mainly due to the problem of seating all the SO athletes before the main entertainments began. It was understandable that the Leicester organizers and SOGB wished to make a major, Olympics-style, statement that involved almost all competitors, but this becomes problematic if *all* those who enter the stadium then have to find seats. The ceremony must either start much earlier – in the late afternoon – or some of the athletes must already be seated before the parade begins, and/or the event needs to be reduced in format. A four-hour ceremony of this sort, one

that is liberally laced with speeches, is probably too much for any athlete on the eve of competition especially if, as was the case here, it concludes at close to 11pm. Part of the host's – and SOGB's – legacy of 2009 ought to be a re-planning of the blue-ribbon Games Opening Ceremony.

17.46 Throughout our research there was consistent criticism by sections of the Leicester public of the relative lack (as they saw it) of effective *marketing and advertising* of the Games in Leicester and its surrounds. In this sense, the 2009 Games seemed rather to miss their mark somewhat, at least as measured by our public feedback. The advantages of a successful marketing campaign are that it: maximises the impact of the event's branding within the local area; raises the profile of the host city; and, most importantly, it potentially raises local awareness of learning disability. As outlined in Part I, there was considerable effort put into the promotion of SOL 2009 and a reasonably strong Games 'brand' was created; so why the public criticism? Firstly, SOL 2009 seemed to be integrated locally into a more general 'One Leicester' promotional campaign rather than fully establish itself as a distinctive event in its own right. On the eve of the Games, for example, the authors noted the 'brand confusion' which existed in the Leicester city centre – where there were banners advertising a range of different events and campaigns – and the relative lack of promotional material specifically about Special Olympics. Timing and resources may also have been factors here, but it did feel as if the Games were in competition with other local activities and this may be part of the reason why some locals missed the message. Because of this, and also time and some financial constraints, Leicester found it a little difficult to build a strong local 'brand awareness' around the Games or to devote sufficient resources to its extensive local promotion. This is an important lesson and part of the local legacy of 2009. However, despite all these problems – which were clearly reflected in our public survey returns – we should also point out that our research also strongly suggests that local people in Leicester felt that hosting the Games had major beneficial effects for the national profile of the city and for the generation of local civic pride – considerable plusses for the branding of any host city.



### *The Leicester Volunteers*

17.47 Capacity building is a key aspect of what we might call the ‘soft’ legacy of events such as Special Olympics, and this should include at its heart the passing of organizers’ knowledge from one event to another. In this respect, our report is obviously part of this process. But another form of capacity building involves improving on and utilizing resources which are developed as a direct result of hosting the Games. The volunteers for SOL – perhaps as one might expect – received virtually unanimous praise for their efforts during the Games. Volunteers are a vital aspect of any ‘soft legacy’, especially in areas such as capacity building for host cities as they attempt to create a local pool of skills that can be utilized for other events and to support local third sector and other organizations. This will become more important still as the implications of ‘big society’ national political policies drive home. The experience of the volunteers for Special Olympics also grows the pool of especially young people who have some involvement and knowledge of working specifically with people with learning disabilities. In addition, the longer-term development of what we might call a local ‘culture of volunteerism’ can also contribute to enriching the civic culture and can add to a wider sense of local public participation and well-being. Volunteering can also improve local public services: as we have pointed out, both Leicester City Council and the Leicestershire Constabulary offered employees a chance to volunteer for the five-day working period of the Games for two-and-a-half days pay. Those who took up the offer are likely to have spread information and knowledge about their experiences, which might also have been expected to inform directly their own professional practices.

17.48 The Leicester volunteers were also perhaps especially important for the 2009 Games because it was largely their involvement which added a local presence and a much-needed ethnic diversity to the mainly ethnic mono-culture which was presented by the visiting Games athletes and families. Indeed, this opportunity provided by the volunteers for visitors to mix with people from different ethnic backgrounds was commented upon positively by SO visitors to Leicester and it signals what should be one of the real legacies of the Leicester Games 2009

for Special Olympics: the national organization must do better to embrace diversity in all its activities, including, of course, in the recruitment of athletes and volunteering.

17.49 It was one of the aims of the organizers from the outset for Leicester to have people with learning disabilities among the SO volunteers, and this plan worked well. So we were surprised to hear from local learning disability advisors in Leicester that there was some initial resistance (including from SOGB) to the learning disability training organized for volunteers for the 2009 Games, in part because of cost, but also on the grounds of 'relevance'. Apparently, this sort of specific training had never been provided for volunteers at earlier Games, an absence which expressly 'shocked' disability representatives of the Leicester hosts.<sup>261</sup> We agree with the workers in Leicester that this sort of training should actually be a non-negotiable and a fundamental part of what the hosts must provide for the volunteers at future Games. Our research shows that feedback from volunteers who attended the training in Leicester was very positive. We also attended the training (which covered around 500 people) and we see it as an important Leicester legacy for raising awareness and skills from the 2009 Games, something which should now become part of the minimum package which is required for staging the Games.

17.50 Using the database in Leicester of over 1,000 Special Olympics volunteers after the Games departed in order to build on the skills and experiences of those involved, is obviously important for any lasting local legacy impact. Some of these volunteers are non-locals and some were already older and quite experienced in their disability work. But many of them are new, local younger volunteers, a number of whom have aspirations for more volunteering, including for London 2012. This step up from Special Olympics, thus adding to the employability prospects of individual volunteers, is obviously important in a legacy sense, and it will have opened up personal and professional opportunities for some younger volunteers. Also of importance locally is our understanding that the Leicester volunteer database has already been called upon to support other events in Leicestershire, such as the stewarding for *LOROS* sponsored running events and supporting the Inclusive Youth Games held in Loughborough in

July 2010. Referring to the latter event, Kate Scott, the Schools Sports Development Officer for Leicester-Shire and Rutland Sport, claimed more specifically that:

*[O]ne of the main impacts of the SO has been the volunteers. Since the [SO] Games we have a much stronger adult volunteering structure and have benefitted from being able to utilize these volunteers at some of our other events such as the Inclusive Youth Games.<sup>262</sup>*

17.51 This is encouraging news, but keeping up the energy and enthusiasm among volunteers that was generated by their involvement in an event such as the Summer Games is never easy. A proposed volunteers' group emergent from SOL and supported by SOGB was only finally made ready for launch via an Open Evening in Leicester on 7 October 2010, some 14 months after the Games ended. A large number of potential members of this group have already been lost along the way. However, right from the outset of this proposed project there was a commitment in this group to work with the MATP Athletes from the Leicester Games to establish a new SOGB Group designed to bring athletes and volunteers closer together. But the overall aim of the SOL volunteer group is, 'to enhance the lives of people with a learning disability through sport and social activity'.<sup>263</sup> Both SOGB and the authorities in Leicester (including Voluntary Action Leicester) will need to work collaboratively to help maintain this group, which has the potential to contribute to supporting people with learning disabilities in sport in Leicestershire and beyond. It might also be able to contribute considerably to the learning process of future hosts regarding Games volunteering and the challenges of retaining post-Games volunteers in learning disability sport.

17.52 The Leicester volunteers were a major success story of the Games, but we think more could probably have been done to plan how Leicester might best utilise the experiences of new volunteers specifically in the field of learning disability after the Games had departed the city. This process could have usefully involved consultations and planning with organisations in and around the city that worked directly with people with learning disabilities. Certainly, Nick

Townsend from Self Unlimited, talking more than one year after the Games, was very sceptical that there had been any real impact locally in terms of the channelling of more volunteers directly into work with people with learning disabilities. The pressure on the local authority in simply producing a successful Games was intense, of course, so looking strategically beyond July 2009 probably seemed impossible at the time. Who really plans well for the period *after* a major sporting event? However, more planning for the local post-Games disability landscape – involving co-working between SOGB, Leicester City Council and voluntary and charity bodies working locally in this area – could have produced a rather more effective action plan designed to maintain Special Olympics volunteers for future work in the arena of sport and learning disability in Leicester and acted as a model for future hosts.

17.53 Of course, some volunteers are attracted by the scale, camaraderie and media coverage of a major event and will not want to work, for example, on Special Olympics training or on more routine work on disability sport. And, as we have said, local authorities are liable to be so exhausted by, and so focused on, the hosting process, that thinking about what happens *after* the Games might be expecting too much from them. Hindsight is a fine thing and we fully understand their problems. But the nature of legacy precisely means thinking carefully and strategically about *what next*? Perhaps the strategic lead for this planning work with Games volunteers should come centrally, from SOGB? After all, local volunteers are their lifeblood and working out how to maintain connections between SOGB and Games volunteers in different locations ought to be a clearly defined feature of the national body's routine governance activities. VAL and local voluntary groups in the learning disability field could contribute vitally to this work in the Leicester area, with funds allocated accordingly in a partnership arrangement. Again, SOGB and future hosts might learn from the Leicester experience on this score.

#### *Human capital: the Games organizers and service staff*

17.54 It is clear from our research that in organizing and administering the 2009 Games some key figures, such as the Functional Heads and senior local administrators, have gained a great

deal in terms of the development of their professional and personal capacities, knowledge and skills. We cover such matters in some detail in earlier sections. This is both in relation to working on mega-events and in terms of boosting their competence and confidence in the wider field of learning disability. These potential longer-term benefits, however, were acquired on the basis of some notable short-term costs, partially because of constraints on resources. This produced considerable stress, sacrifice, corner-cutting and occasional disillusionment in Leicester in the build-up to the Games. It was often only the deep, personal and professional commitment to the athletes and families which kept people going in the most difficult of circumstances. The fear – and the human cost – of failure seemed to drive workers on to deliver against the odds, but this is really no sensible way to run an event of this scale in future.

17.55 For Leicester, part of the positive legacy here comes in the shape of raising commercial awareness among local businesses and service providers who received guidance and training and who gained from their experience of work with people with learning disabilities as athletes, family members and customers. Having the National Summer Games in the city meant that sport and commerce briefly became the new twin levers via which the Learning Disability Team in Leicester could make inroads into the sorts of arenas in which they had often struggled to make good headway, as Justin Hammond explains:

*The Special Olympics enabled us [the Leicester disability team] to open doors in other organisations we would never normally be able to get into, not as people from the learning disability service in Leicester. So, tourist information, hoteliers, transport: places we have always needed to get into. But because we are only talking about a small group of people it is assumed they receive all they need from social services and no-one else needs to bother with them. All of a sudden, leaning disability becomes a popular thing, with some financial return. That means, all of a sudden, we can get some awareness raising training going. Then their eyes get opened to the fact that there are people with learning disabilities out there who could be customers of theirs. They could even be future members of staff. The perception was being changed.*<sup>264</sup>

17.56 Despite this early promise, the Leicester Learning Disability Team were actually not aware of *any* new jobs being created in Leicester for people with learning disabilities as a direct result

of hosting the Games, though they pointed out that behind the scenes local people with learning disabilities had been involved as able volunteers: in making murals to celebrate the Games, and in filling athletes' Games bags, for example. The Team was also concerned, in an ethical sense, that some local people with learning disabilities had given plenty of their time to promoting the Games for little or no financial reward. But irrespective of this potential 'hard' legacy of more employment – real jobs – on the 'soft legacy' side the effects of awareness training provided for Leicester bus drivers and taxi-drivers did not easily disappear the instant Special Olympics left. In Hammond's words, awareness training about learning disabilities 'can't be removed after it's happened'. And having Special Olympics around to offer welcome leverage in this context helped to address some everyday assumptions in Leicester about disability, assumptions which can be challenged via a ripple effect of spreading new information: In Hammond's words:

*We had fascinating conversations [with local businesses] about access. Hoteliers had always thought that 'access' meant have we got a ramp outside the front door and a handle in case you are using a walking stick. And is the room desk at the right level. They'd never thought about their signage; about using symbols as well as using written words. Are they communicating in plain English? It made them think differently ... and the conversations we had [with bus drivers] were: 'We didn't realise that people with learning disabilities were like that.' And, 'Oh yeah, that person who gets on my bus every day has a learning disability.' Connections were definitely made. And from there, they talk to their family members and friends, and there is a much bigger impact. Over 100 bus drivers were trained – that must have had an impact.*

17.57 Hammond was frustrated that what would have been one really tangible potential legacy from the Games for Leicester – that every single sign in the city indicating a local facility or a venue was given a symbol, as well as words – could not actually be achieved. Had it been, Leicester might really be justifiably known as *the* city in England which is 'friendly' to people with learning disabilities. On another tack, the members of staff in the Games organising team who had been hardened and skilled by having 'been through the fire', in preparing for the Games had contributed something which would only prove an important part of the Games legacy if this experience was put to good future use, both locally and in relation to learning disability and Special Olympics more generally. To what extent, if at all, have these hard-won

benefits been built upon in Leicester and outside? Again, it is difficult to make a long-term judgement on this issue, though it might have involved some strategic post-Games planning for those Leicester staff who excelled in their roles with the Games. There are relatively few signs that this actually occurred in the city, in part because hard-pressed local authorities often lack some of the flexibility necessary to make best use of the acquired expertise of members of staff who are assigned temporarily to these major projects. But surely it is important – and cost effective – for local citizens (including of course people with a learning disability and their families) that these unique experiences of public servants are put to best use over time?<sup>265</sup>

17.58 To what extent, too, will these key Leicester Games staff have opportunities to *pass on* their expertise to future hosts and to SOGB? In 2009, there was no institutional and formal process we could identify for this to occur. These would seem to us to be a normal part of good practice for Games governance. Certainly, the Leicester hosts had only brief, largely informal, contact with their Glasgow predecessors when they really needed much more external support and guidance. All Games and all cities have their own specificities, but we also think that much of the experience acquired in running the Games is precious and generic and it needs to be stored and used much more efficiently. We think it should be the responsibility of SOGB, in concert with Games hosts, to ensure a much more effective transmission of knowledge and experience between Games' hosts. SOGB should fund a workshop event, possibly over a period of a few days, which will allow this vital process of knowledge transmission to occur very early in the tenure of the new hosts. The research team also plan to host an event in Leicester in 2011 to look at the future of learning disability sport and at some of the issues arising out of the research.

17.59 While this report is itself a de facto legacy of SOL 2009 – and SOGB and Leicester City Council have strongly supported this research – there seems to have been a general absence of what we might call 'integrated' thinking regarding the legacy from the Games for people with learning disabilities in Leicester. Before the Games, none of the city's various third sector disability groups had been consulted about Leicester hosting Special Olympics National Summer

Games and relatively little provision has been made since to try to use the Games as a means of developing new local networks to better support people with learning disabilities. There was some awareness at senior levels about the need for a legacy in terms of improving people's health, and the appointment of an athlete with learning disabilities to the Games Organising Committee was a progressive move for Leicester, one which allowed for a much greater awareness of issues concerning people with learning disabilities. (It would be good practice for *all* board members and organizers to undertake some basic awareness training regarding working with people with learning disabilities). However, it seems insufficient to assume that even hosting a highly successful SO Games – and the positive publicity that this was likely to bring – might, in and of itself, promote a lasting legacy and that some local people with learning disabilities might 'automatically' take up some form of sporting activity as a result.

17.60 Instead, focused and coordinated hard work is probably required to pick up the positive impetus provided by the Games and to produce the necessary pathways and connections between public, third sector and private sector bodies that are necessary for engaging with 'hard-to-reach' groups and those individuals who lie typically well outside the usual Special Olympics channels. As Nick Townsend puts it, to better harness the enormous energy and optimism produced by the 2009 Games,

*You would put in the local infrastructure. You would go to the organizations who are providing services for people with learning disabilities – the Mencaps and the Self Unlimiteds and others – and say we need to put together a network that offers better access to coaching and sporting facilities ... Somebody needs to be doing this 'joining up' work; producing information packs about how to approach local authorities for the use of their facilities, and how to talk to private sporting clubs. A lot of this at the moment is down to parent volunteers and there is a limit to how much parents can do. We need a bigger infrastructure. There is a huge capacity for volunteering in this country that remains untapped: that is an organizational issue, not a funding one.<sup>266</sup>*

17.61 Having athlete Lee Penfold on the Games Organising Committee and Nick Townsend on the Games Board certainly strengthened its hand and its knowledge of the learning disability sector in Leicester but, post-Games, much of the momentum generated by July 2009 was not



really built upon. Although the Leicester Learning Disability Team had noticed some positive outcomes for their own work in the city since the Games, their lasting, institutional impact was more doubtful, as Trish Branson and Justin Hammond confirmed, respectively:

*What I'm hearing from colleagues in the council, I'm hearing that people with learning disabilities are important priorities because they are citizens of Leicester. So we are invited to contribute to different things today because they see us as the 'experts' in learning disability. There is a more conscious effort: I have more dialogue now with corporate strategic directors than I had 18 months or two years ago ... But unless we get an action plan, with some real champions, come the new financial year I think it [the impact of Special Olympics] will be gone. We need to identify the people who can keep it going.<sup>267</sup>*

*If you say 'Leicester' when you go to an event now people will say: 'You did the Special Olympics, didn't you?' It was on the news, wasn't it: the national news? That won't last long, but at the moment Leicester is on the map for a learning disability event. It's a win-win for us.<sup>268</sup>*

17.62 These are positive signs for Leicester, certainly, and not building a little more strategically locally on the impact of the Games occurred for understandable reasons, including the strong event focus of SOL, the lack of resources, and some considerable local fatigue. But it was also, in our view, because of a relative lack of real direction and external guidance on this issue from SOGB. A forum or group supported by SOGB and arising out of the SOL Games Board could have built more effectively on the greater local public awareness of people with learning disabilities that the Games had helped establish in the Leicester area. This group could then have worked at building up the network of local and national relationships necessary in this area for really improving sporting provision and support for people with learning disabilities over the longer term. Such networks would include, for example: voluntary groups; private sports clubs; city and county councils; Special Olympics volunteers; the Inclusive Youth Games; existing Special Olympics providers; and people working in minority ethnic communities in the city. This forum – with some external support – might then have provided a rather better balance between the immediate positive sensations of being part of the Leicester Games and trying to establish a meaningful and lasting Games legacy in Leicester. For Nick Townsend, for example:

*In terms of personal memories, there is no doubt that athletes will have taken away a huge legacy of memories, medals and mementos – our merchandise was sold out. There*

*will be terrific memories. But in terms of contributing to the ongoing commitment to sport, unless the local organizers are still doing it, it's [the Games] probably made no difference at all. There is no evidence that SOGB or the city council are making any greater efforts here since the Games. So in that sense there is no legacy. Unless we [the Games Board] as a group pick up the baton and run with it and make something happen ... But we have no greater support, no greater infrastructure, no greater funding. It's just the way the world works.*<sup>269</sup>

17.63 Townsend is perhaps overly-negative here. We have already pointed to some of the longer term, positive local outcomes of hosting the Games in Leicester. And we do not want to understate the problems in making this sort of post-Games network of partners survive and deliver. But in our view he is also essentially correct in pointing out that a really successful Games legacy has to involve the perpetuation of some of the structures built around, and for, the Games, as well as the construction of new ones designed to prolong its local impact. We will return to some of these important major themes in the final section below.

#### *iv) Special Olympics Great Britain's Legacy: Facing Challenging Times*

17.64 Finally, we offer in this section some brief observations about the role of Special Olympics Great Britain and its own legacy following SOL 2009. We also speculate here a little on potential future developments and their possible consequences for Special Olympics as currently organised, and for the athletes and families it serves. Firstly, it should be pointed out that SOGB is just one body within a growing list of local and other organisations that service learning disability sport today. But SOGB clearly deals with a relatively large number of athletes nationally and it boasts a well-established and well organised athlete training programme. Given its relatively limited resources and its strong reliance on the voluntary efforts of its members, SOGB has actually been remarkably successful in providing and spreading provision for learning disability sport and in recruiting powerful supporters for its activities. Indeed, without the sterling efforts of Special Olympics GB, many learning disabled athletes and their families in the UK would lead much less fulfilling lives.

17.65 However, we should also point out that a number of our interviewees involved in organising SOL commented on what they experienced as the relative lack of accumulated knowledge and support offered from the centre for the Leicester Games. SOGB is relatively ‘hands-off’ in that sense – it offered regular back-up in Leicester via just one member of SOGB staff – and this reluctance to intervene locally can provide a welcome freedom for local organisers to ‘invent’ or shape their own Games. But many of our Leicester interviewees thought the balance in this respect was probably just too much weighted against the interests and capacities of the local organisers, and that they had to do most of their problem-solving without what they considered would have been useful and appropriate *national* guidance. There seems to be no reliable, one-size-fits-all, generic template to act as a trusty roadmap for cities organising the Games, and this might be something that SOGB should consider developing and providing for future hosts who sometimes feel that they constantly have to ‘reinvent the wheel’ to put on the Games.

17.66 We have also indicated that, although it is a national sporting body of some prominence, the influence of SOGB is profoundly uneven nationally. To new observers, one of the most noticeable aspects of SOL 2009 was the rather erratic distribution of athletes drawn from across Britain. One example was the very high level of representation of rural Scottish athletes compared to the very low number drawn from the much more populous English city and Greater London areas. SOGB has argued that the historical reason for London’s low representation at the Games is the difficulty in coordinating SO activities across the 33 London boroughs. It claims that the Metropolitan boroughs do not work together effectively to provide sporting opportunities for people with learning disabilities.<sup>270</sup> It may be that through the media coverage of SOL 2009 there could even be a boost to Special Olympics activity in the capital. But we suspect that this lack of general SO impact in London may also be more generally reflected in other large English cities in the north and north-west.

17.67 The real difficulty here is that Special Olympics GB tends to expand its activities only where and when local volunteers want to adopt and extend Special Olympics provision. So it is

not a body which is especially attuned to working in concert with local authorities or to responding to the specific sporting needs of people with learning disabilities in places where perhaps the social fabric is damaged and/or where volunteering is traditionally low, or where learning disability is regarded as an issue to be dealt with privately within conventional family structures. These are among the reasons why Special Olympics, in its current structure at least, is likely to have considerable difficulty in effectively addressing the pressing diversity questions we have posed in various places in this report. Moreover, given the changing political and social climate in disability sport – including the inclusion of athletes with learning difficulties in the 2012 Paralympics and the profound difficulties in raising funding support for the 2009 SO Games – SOL 2009 could even mark something of a watershed for SOGB and even for the future of the National Summer Games. As one of the SOL Board members put it to us:

*SOGB need to up their game, broaden their thinking. They seem sometimes national in outlook, but they are parochial in other ways. They seem to be limited by what they think is possible ... because they are inward looking rather than outward looking.*<sup>271</sup>

17.68 This is a strong critique and it certainly underplays some of the real successes of SOGB and also its pioneering work with families and athletes in plenty of disadvantaged parts of Britain. But it also strikes at the heart of the current dilemma the organisation faces. One can read this combination of barriers and potential new developments as an opportunity, rather than a threat to SOGB, but one might also quite reasonably conclude that in the current difficult economic and political climate it might be better for SOGB to remain in the relative ‘comfort zone’ of being an incremental, rather selective and conservative, volunteer-driven and largely white sporting learning disability organisation. After all, it is pretty effective in what it does, and attempts to expand the Special Olympics organisation, the National Summer Games, and to spread the activities of SOGB more evenly nationally and by ethnic background might also make the organisation – and the Games – increasingly unwieldy to manage in their current formats. Such expansion would mean that, without stringent, competitive selection policies, it will probably make it impossible even for reasonably-sized British cities such as Leicester to host the National Summer Games in its entirety in future. But *not* to do so – not to pursue a policy of expansion and of greater collaboration and exchange with other disability bodies, sporting

organisations, local authorities and voluntary groups – will mean, in our view, that SOGB is likely to look more and more outmoded and critically limited in modern Britain, precisely because of its patchy national coverage and especially because of the continuing, visible exclusion of many disabled athletes, perhaps particularly those drawn from urban, black and Asian British households. What might seem sensible for SOGB and those currently involved inside Special Olympics might not be quite so advisable for the wider UK community of people with learning disabilities who have an interest in sport.

17.69 These are very difficult choices with no easy answers, but they are ones which cannot be easily avoided not least because of the crucial equity and exclusion issues they raise. If these lines of reasoning are pursued by SOGB they would almost undoubtedly also pose other pertinent new questions for the national body. These might include: what impact would these changes have on the identity and philosophy of SOGB, especially on its unique participatory ethos? And what impact would these changes have on cities who wanted to host a new version of the National Summer Games? Perhaps different Games in different cities would have to deal with different sports in the new era? Perhaps more Games would be regional, rather than national, with more of a competitive, selection process in operation for national events in order to limit their size? Positive outcomes here might be more regular, locally based, media coverage in future for learning disability sport. These are the sorts of technical but important questions which could be raised by a more expansive and more inclusive approach to learning disability sport, and they would certainly undermine aspects of the Summer Games in their current guise. Funding provision, for example, to support a very small number of competitors in very expensive sports might have to be reviewed in favour of more inclusive options. Severely disabled people who may currently benefit hugely from Special Olympics and who compete in the National Games every four years might suddenly find their assumed place threatened by new – but equally legitimate – disabled claimants. Some form of positive action might be needed initially to attract athletes from BME backgrounds. Again, there are no easy choices here.

17.70 What is also certain is that in order to respond to these current forms of exclusion and to the relative imbalances we have discussed above in the relationship between the centre (SOGB) and the periphery (Games' hosts, regions, and ethnic minority communities), the national body will have to rethink its current structures, philosophy and indeed its modus operandi. It would need to look rather more determinedly 'outwards', as Nick Townsend suggests, for new partners and new forms of funding and also build up considerably its connections with ethnic minority groups, other learning disability bodies, national governing bodies for sport and other agencies. The old forms of charity support and celebrity fundraising seem far too limited to face the new challenges ahead. Finally, SOGB would need to adopt a much more consciously integrative approach to its work, and also to rethink the format of the Summer Games. These are all major issues.

17.71 To conclude, it seems clear that disability and learning disability sport in Britain will become increasingly contested ground and that this will have implications in turn for future funding possibilities and for the gaining of political influence, not just within the domain of learning disability, but also in the corridors of sports governance and sports provision. People with learning disabilities in Britain are currently not especially well served for their sporting activities and those who do have positive experiences depend largely on the serendipity of local volunteering. We face an immediate future which promises wider constraints for all on public spending and a stronger general commitment from the government that communities should look more to their own resources and skills and less to the state for support. SOGB has to ask itself is it really geared up in its current guise for the considerable challenges which lie ahead? And is it, in its current format, offering the best opportunities possible for people with learning disabilities from a range of backgrounds who want to play competitively and to participate in sport? The future seems uncertain, but what does seem clear is that substantial change, both for SOGB and for provision for sport for British people with learning disabilities, is now non-negotiable.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> NB This section is a summary of Susan Barton's *A Sporting Chance: The History of Special Olympics Great Britain* (Leicester City Council, 2009), which was produced as the first part of the research project and published in May 2009 to coincide with the lead-up to the Games.

<sup>2</sup> Barton, *A Sporting Chance*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Barton, *A Sporting Chance*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> High on the list here would be the (ultimately frustrated) ambition that the city could take its place in the England bid to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup finals. Added later to these hopes would be a bid by Leicester to be considered for the new accolade of 'UK City of Culture' in 2013, at least in part because of what the city had 'learned', according to City Council leader Ross Willmott, from the experience of hosting Special Olympics Summer Games earlier that year.

<sup>5</sup> *Games Evaluation Report: 8<sup>th</sup> National Special Olympics GB Summer Games 2009 – Leicester*, Written and compiled by Steve Humphries, Games Director (Leicester City Council: 2009), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Richard Watson, SOL 2009 Executive Director, Director of Cultural Services, Leicester City Council, 8 July 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Ted Cassidy, SOL 2009 Chair, 21 July 2009.

<sup>8</sup> The Sport England survey found that just 15% of people over the age of 16 in Leicester do regular exercise. This was well below the national average of 21% and down from 18% in 2007. See 'Drive to get us fit' *Leicester Mercury* 9 July 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Andy Connelly, SOL 2009 Board Member, Leicester City Councillor, 8 July 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Richard Watson.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Steve White, SOL 2009 Board Member, 7 July 2009.

<sup>12</sup> 'Leicester Bid Document', p. 25

<sup>13</sup> Leicester City Council press release, 21 March 2007

<sup>14</sup> Report on Finance Committee Legacy Workshop, Special Olympics Summer Games Leicester 2009 Ltd, 18 December 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Karen Wallin, SOGB Chief Operating Officer, 13 July 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Councillor Andy Connelly indicated his 'surprise' that so few SO athletes in the East Midlands region actually came from Leicester or from other cities in the area. Interview with Andy Connelly.

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- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Karen Wallin.
- <sup>18</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 27.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with Ted Cassidy.
- <sup>20</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 23.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with Karen Wallin.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Highlight Report', 22 April 2008, p. 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Richard Watson.
- <sup>24</sup> Interview with Karen Wallin.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with Andy Connelly.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with Neville Hammonds, SOL 2009 Finance Advisor, 20 July 2009.
- <sup>27</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 25.
- <sup>28</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 25.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Highlight Report', 22 April 2008, p. 1.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with Steve Humphries, SOL 2009 Games Director, 9 July 2009.
- <sup>31</sup> Report on Finance Committee Legacy Workshop, Special Olympics Summer Games Leicester 2009 Ltd, 18 December 2009.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Richard Watson.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with Richard Watson.
- <sup>34</sup> Field Notes, 27 July 2009.
- <sup>35</sup> There were difficulties at some venues accommodating local spectators and on one occasion a wheelchair-bound local woman with learning disabilities was denied access to the Games football tournament because she was mistakenly told by a volunteer that the venue was not 'wheelchair-friendly.' In the wake of much local embarrassment, the woman and her husband was later invited by SOL to present medals to some of the winning teams, as the *Leicester Mercury* coverage strived gallantly to convert what had been quite a serious PR gaffe for the organisers into a positive story for Special Olympics.
- <sup>36</sup> SOL Games Organising Committee Minutes, 10 April 2008.
- <sup>37</sup> 'Highlight Report', 28 May 2008, p. 59.



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<sup>38</sup> ‘Souvenir Programme, Special Olympics Leicester 2009’, p. 35

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Zara Jurenko, SOL 2009 Games Ambassador, SO Athlete, 12 May 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Zara Jurenko.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Steve White.

<sup>42</sup> The Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Manjula Sood, chose Special Olympics Leicester 2009 as her dedicated mayoral charity for her year of office and she devoted those twelve months to raising funds and awareness in order to support city and county athletes with learning disabilities to be able to compete in the Games and to celebrate and research their achievements. Volunteers collected for the mayor’s appeal at all major City Council organised public events during the period May 2008 to May 2009. A range of local community events also raised and donated money to the appeal.

<sup>43</sup> The aim of this media campaign was to raise enough money to pay for new tracksuits and training tops for the East Midlands region team taking part in the Games. This appeal was promoted in the pages of the newspaper over the Christmas and New Year periods covering late-2008 and early-2009. *Mercury* readers were invited to make donations via their own local projects and stories soon appeared of how money had been raised and also more generally about Special Olympics, the Leicester Games and the athletes who would benefit from the new sports clothing. Via these routes the *Leicester Mercury’s* readers reached their stated target of £10,000, and so the 200 East Midlands athletes were kitted out for the Games by funds raised by the ‘ordinary’ people of Leicester and Leicestershire.

<sup>44</sup> In April 2009, 500 people took part in a 10 km sponsored walk organised by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. The proceeds were shared by both the Anthony Nolan Trust and SOL. Also in that month, the Bollywood singing star Bankim Pathak performed at the De Montfort Hall to support the Lord Mayor’s appeal. In May, Leicester City FC’s Alan Birchenall’s annual charity run around the Walkers Stadium supported Prostaids and SOL. Islamic Relief organised a community football tournament in aid of the appeal and handed over a cheque for the money raised to Gary Lineker during TV coverage of the Games football tournament. Finally, the Bardi Wind Orchestra performed in a concert at the De Montfort Hall to raise funds for SOL in June.

<sup>45</sup> Special Olympics Summer Games, Leicester 2009, Legacy Action Plan, 17 September 2009, item 7.

<sup>46</sup> Special Olympics Summer Games, Leicester 2009, Legacy Action Plan, 17 September 2009, item 7.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Richard Watson.

<sup>48</sup> We return later in the report to a more detailed discussion of local press and regional TV coverage of the Games.

<sup>49</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 24 June 2009, p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 21 May 2009.

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<sup>52</sup> Leicester Mercury, 30 May 2009.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Peter Cookson, Special Olympics volunteer, Leicester Mercury, 6 June 2009, Mailbox.

<sup>54</sup> Barton, A Sporting Chance, p. 88.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Steve White.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Andy Connelly.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Andy Connelly.

<sup>58</sup> 'SOGB National Summer Games Bid Specification 2009', p.7.

<sup>59</sup> Field Notes 25 July 2010.

<sup>60</sup> See ARTICLE

<sup>61</sup> Anjali Dance Company Mission Statement on the company's website: [www.anjali.co.uk](http://www.anjali.co.uk)

<sup>62</sup> See, [www.findyourtalent.org](http://www.findyourtalent.org)

<sup>63</sup> Radio Leicester, 26 July 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Radio Leicester, 26 July 2009.

<sup>65</sup> Correspondence with Sameena Ali-Khan, *ITV Central Tonight*, July 2010.

<sup>66</sup> On 29 July 2009 – in the middle of Games week – a letter duly appeared in the Leicester Mercury from an irate Leicester resident who had turned up with her children for the swimming event to offer local support for Special Olympics. She was told there was simply no public access available though it had been stated in Games publicity that access for the public to some venues was limited or even unavailable.

<sup>67</sup> Leicester Special Olympics *Head of Delegation* manual 2009 (un-numbered) says that:  
*'The reported assessments of the athletes in the Registration Forms must accurately reflect their ability. Individuals of teams that are identified as not participating to their full potential with the intent of being placed in a lower division will be disqualified from competition. Athletes will be divisioned by reported gender, age and athletic ability for preliminary competition. They will be re-divisioned for the finals based on their results in the preliminaries, with each group having three to eight athletes (teams). Athletes whose performance improves significantly between preliminaries and finals may be disqualified.'*

<sup>68</sup> Field Notes, 26 July 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Field Notes, 26 July 2009.

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<sup>70</sup> Field Notes, 29 July 2009.

<sup>71</sup> ‘We’ll meet Olympic standard, say bosses’ *Leicester Mercury* 4 July 2009. In the story a local athlete Craig Sabin was quoted as saying ‘The track itself is lovely but the general appearance outside is a bit shabby. It’s off-putting, especially to people visiting the city for the first time.’

<sup>72</sup> Field Notes, 26 July 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Field Notes 26 July 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Field Notes 26 July 2009.

<sup>75</sup> Radio Leicester, 27 July 2009.

<sup>76</sup> See Part I, footnote 44.

<sup>77</sup> Field Notes, 28 July 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Field Notes, 29 July 2009.

<sup>79</sup> See, ‘City venues give perfect stage to showcase talent’ *Leicester Mercury*, 27 July 2009.

<sup>80</sup> Field Notes, 29 July 2009.

<sup>81</sup> Field Notes, 25 July 2009.

<sup>82</sup> Field Notes, 25 July 2009.

<sup>83</sup> Field Notes, 29 July 2009.

<sup>84</sup> The description came from Games Director Steve Humphries, *Leicester Mercury*, 3 August 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Field Notes 27 July 2009. We are grateful to James Panter for his research at the cricket venue.

<sup>86</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 110.

<sup>87</sup> *Self Unlimited* website: <http://www.selfunlimited.co.uk/Special+Olympics>

<sup>88</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 1 August 2009.

<sup>89</sup> Field Notes. 29 July 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Field Notes, 29 July 2009.

<sup>91</sup> Northern Region HOD, Heads of Delegation Survey, SOL Legacy Project, February 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Fife Region HOD, Disability Sport Fife, Heads of Delegation Survey.

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- <sup>93</sup> Eastern Region HOD, Heads of Delegation Survey.
- <sup>94</sup> South East Region HOD, Heads of Delegation Survey.
- <sup>95</sup> Jan Walmsley, 'Life history interviews with people with learning disabilities', *Oral History*, vol. 23 (1), 1995, pp. 71-77.
- <sup>96</sup> Susan Barton has worked in schools and colleges for more than 10 years with people with learning disabilities.
- <sup>97</sup> Barton, *A Sporting Chance*, p. 84.
- <sup>98</sup> Interview with Zara Jurenko.
- <sup>99</sup> Report also provided to the authors.
- <sup>100</sup> T. Baum & L. Lockstone 'Volunteers and mega-sporting events: developing a research framework' *International Journal of Event Management Research*, vol. 3 (1), 2007, pp. 29-41.
- <sup>101</sup> B. Green & L. Chalip, 'Paths to volunteer commitment' in R. Stebbins & M. Graham (eds.) *Volunteering in Leisure* (CABI Publishing: 2004), p. 49.
- <sup>102</sup> M. Roche, *Mega Events: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (Routledge: 2000), p. 1.
- <sup>103</sup> Baum & Lockstone, 'Volunteers and mega-sporting events', pp. 32-4.
- <sup>104</sup> See C. Williams, 'Developing a culture of volunteering: beyond the Third Sector approach' *Journal of Voluntary Sector Research*, vol. 1 (1), 2008, pp. 25-44.
- <sup>105</sup> J. Pearce, *Volunteers: the Organisational Behaviour of Unpaid Workers* (Routledge: 1993).
- <sup>106</sup> L. Byren 'Bounce-back of episodic volunteers in local government community and environmental groups', Presentation to the 11<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Volunteering Australia, Melbourne, March 2006
- <sup>107</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 93.
- <sup>108</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 93.
- <sup>109</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 93.
- <sup>110</sup> At Leicester City Council staff were allowed an additional 2.5 days annual leave if they took 2.5 days leave to volunteer for the Games. Correspondence with Richard Watson.
- <sup>111</sup> Baum & Lockstone, 'Volunteers and mega-sporting events', p. 35.

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<sup>112</sup> Information derived from VAL volunteer database. We are grateful to VAL for allowing access to this database.

<sup>113</sup> Correspondence with Jim McCallum, Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL).

<sup>114</sup> Correspondence with Jim McCallum.

<sup>115</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 95

<sup>116</sup> Report on Finance Committee Legacy Workshop, Special Olympics Summer Games Leicester 2009 Ltd, 18 December 2009.

<sup>117</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 95.

<sup>118</sup> 'Special Olympics Great Britain: A Year in Review 2009', p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 130.

<sup>120</sup> 'SOGB, A Year in Review 2009', p. 16.

<sup>121</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 98.

<sup>122</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 97.

<sup>123</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 96.

<sup>124</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 97.

<sup>125</sup> Correspondence with the authors.

<sup>126</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 97.

<sup>127</sup> Baum & Lockstone, 'Volunteers and mega-sporting events', p. 35.

<sup>128</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 97.

<sup>129</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 92.

<sup>130</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 97.

<sup>131</sup> 'SOL 2009, Volunteering Experience Feedback Survey', VAL, January 2010.

<sup>132</sup> 'SOL 2009, Volunteering Experience Feedback Survey', VAL, January 2010.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in the *Leicester Mercury* 28 July 2009.

<sup>134</sup> Correspondence with the authors, 19 August 2010.

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<sup>135</sup> Correspondence with the authors 20 August 2010.

<sup>136</sup> Baum & Lockstone, 'Volunteers and mega-sporting events', p. 37.

<sup>137</sup> Report on Finance Committee Legacy Workshop, Special Olympics Summer Games Leicester 2009 Ltd, 18 December 2009.

<sup>138</sup> Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disability for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Department of Health: 2001).

<sup>139</sup> John Turnbull, 'The legacy of valuing people in England' in Martin Bollard (ed.), Intellectual Disability and Inclusion: a critical review (Elsevier: 2009), p. 27.

<sup>140</sup> Turnbull, 'The legacy of valuing people in England', p. 27.

<sup>141</sup> John Turnbull, 'The legacy of valuing people in England', p. 27.

<sup>142</sup> E. Emerson, S. Malam, I. Davies and K. Spencer, Adults with Learning Difficulties in England 2003/4 (Office of National Statistics: 2005).

<sup>143</sup> The issue of bullying for people with learning disabilities was tragically in the news in Leicestershire and nationally soon after the Special Olympics GB National Summer Games. Youths in the village of Barwell in the county had so severely harassed Fiona Pilkington and her 18-year-old disabled daughter Francecca Hardwick – who had little effective support from the police – that Ms. Pilkington eventually took her own life and that of her daughter. See 'An avoidable tragedy', Guardian 19 September 2009.

<sup>144</sup> Field Notes, *passim*.

<sup>145</sup> Games Evaluation Report, p. 53.

<sup>146</sup> Field Notes, *passim*.

<sup>147</sup> Jonathan A Weiss, 'Role of Special Olympics for Mothers of Adult Athletes With Intellectual Disability', American Journal on Mental Retardation, vol. 113 (4), 2008, pp. 241–253.

<sup>148</sup> Weiss, 'Role of Special Olympics for Mothers', pp. 241–253.

<sup>149</sup> Eastern Region HOD, Heads of Delegation Survey.

<sup>150</sup> Northern Region HOD, Heads of Delegation Survey.

<sup>151</sup> J. Ryan and F. Thomas, The Politics of Mental Handicap (revised edition) (Free Association: 1987), p. 67 quoted in Anne Digby, 'Contexts and Perspectives' in David Wright and Anne Digby (eds), From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on People with Learning Disabilities (Routledge, 1996), p.

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16. The use of the word 'handicapped' and not disability highlights how this work was a product of its time. However, the main point of the quote still stands.

<sup>152</sup> Rosalind Brunt, 'Points of View' in Goodwin and Whannel, *Understanding Television*, p. 60.

<sup>153</sup> Jan Walmsley and Dorothy Atkinson, 'Oral History and the History of Learning Disability' in Joanna Bornat et al (eds), *Oral History, Health and Welfare* (Routledge: 2000), pp. 180-7.

<sup>154</sup> 'Jackie', interviewed by Jim Smallman, BBC Radio Leicester, 27 July 2009

<sup>155</sup> Interview with John Sinclair, BBC Radio Leicester, football commentator, 12 August 2010.

<sup>156</sup> Bob Franklin and David Murphy, 'Local newspapers, technology and markets', in Bob Franklin and David Murphy (eds), *Making the Local News: Local Journalism in Context* (Routledge: 1998), p. 17.

<sup>157</sup> 'Jeffrey hopes to add to cabinet full of medals' *Leicester Mercury* 3 July 2009.

<sup>158</sup> 'Gold in home city would be sweetest for Rachel' *Leicester Mercury* 1 July 2009.

<sup>159</sup> 'Lee on the ball for award' *Leicester Mercury* 6 July 2009.

<sup>160</sup> For example in the story about the East Midlands equestrian team, 'Team is ready for Olympic competition' *Leicester Mercury* 7 July 2009.

<sup>161</sup> For example, a *Mercury* story about the Games Village on 28 July 2009 spent some time discussing the medical checks which were available to athletes.

<sup>162</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 2009.

<sup>163</sup> 'Special week leaves so many happy memories' *Leicester Mercury* 3 August 2009

<sup>164</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 72.

<sup>165</sup> SOL Board Meeting Minutes, 16 March 2009.

<sup>166</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 72.

<sup>167</sup> *Games Evaluation Report*, p. 72.

<sup>168</sup> There was no research conducted on other *ITV Central* programmes as they were not recorded.

<sup>169</sup> Personal correspondence with Philip Braund, Head of News, *ITV Central*, 10 June 2010.

<sup>170</sup> Meryl Aldridge, *Understanding the Local Media* (Open University Press: 2007), pp. 106-07.

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<sup>171</sup> Ralph Negrine and Rachel Eyre, 'News and current affairs in regional television broadcasting' in Bob Franklin and David Murphy (eds), *Making the Local News: Local Journalism in Context* (Routledge: 1998), pp. 39-40

<sup>172</sup> Ralph Negrine and Rachel Eyre, 'News and current affairs in regional television broadcasting', pp. 43-4.

<sup>173</sup> Ralph Negrine and Rachel Eyre, 'News and current affairs in regional television broadcasting', pp. 44-7

<sup>174</sup> These findings were based on the recordings of programmes made at De Montfort University's Kimberlin Library. We are grateful to Peter Warrington at the Library for undertaking this work.

<sup>175</sup> Correspondence with Gareth Owen, 2 August 2010.

<sup>176</sup> Correspondence with Gareth Owen.

<sup>177</sup> Correspondence with Gareth Owen.

<sup>178</sup> It may have been that ITV's (and BBC's) broadcasts were restricted by the wet and thundery weather.

<sup>179</sup> Gareth Owen quoted on *ITV Central Tonight*, 31 July 2009.

<sup>180</sup> Ian Payne quote on *ITV Central Tonight*, 31 July 2009.

<sup>181</sup> Correspondence with Gareth Owen.

<sup>182</sup> Garry Whannel, 'Winner Takes All: Competition in A. Goodwin and G. Whannel (eds) *Understanding Television* (Routledge: 1990), pp. 108-09.

<sup>183</sup> Brown remarked: *'I think it's just so exciting, it's so inspirational. Just under 3000 athletes are here from all over the country people with great talent and talent that is going to be recognized this week as many, many people come from Leicester and from the rest of the country to see them and to watch them participate. It's a great day for our country.'*

<sup>184</sup> 'Star backs special games' *Leicester Mercury* 23 June 2009.

<sup>185</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 27 July 2009.

<sup>186</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 27 July 2009.

<sup>187</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 27 July 2009.

<sup>188</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 30 July 2009.

<sup>189</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 29 July 2009.



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- <sup>190</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 31 July 2009.
- <sup>191</sup> Rosalind Brunt, 'Points of View' in Goodwin and Whannel, *Understanding Television*, p. 65.
- <sup>192</sup> These phrases were used 16 times during the coverage analysed.
- <sup>193</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 25 July; 26 July; 27 July 2009.
- <sup>194</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 25 July 2009.
- <sup>195</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 27 July 2009.
- <sup>196</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 27 July 2009.
- <sup>197</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 27 July 2009.
- <sup>198</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 27 July 2009.
- <sup>199</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 29 July 2009.
- <sup>200</sup> *ITV Central Tonight*, 29 July 2009.
- <sup>201</sup> Ralph Negrine and Rachel Eyre, 'News and current affairs in regional television broadcasting', pp. 44-5.
- <sup>202</sup> Correspondence with Gareth Owen.
- <sup>203</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 30 July 2009
- <sup>204</sup> Correspondence with Gareth Owen.
- <sup>205</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 29 July 2009
- <sup>206</sup> *BBC East Midlands Today*, 29 July 2009
- <sup>207</sup> Correspondence with Gareth Owen.
- <sup>208</sup> Leicester Games 2009 Limited Financial Statements for Year Ended 31 March 2010
- <sup>209</sup> Interview with Ann Calvert, North West Region swimming coach, 29 June 2009.
- <sup>210</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 6 August 2009.
- <sup>211</sup> Larry Davidson, 'Choice of a proper methodology to measure quantitative and qualitative effects of the impact of sport', in Claude Jeanrenaud (ed.), *Economic Impact of Sporting Events*, CIES: 1999, pp. 9-28, p. 12.
- <sup>212</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 6 August 2009.

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<sup>213</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 6 August 2009.

<sup>214</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 22 July 2009.

<sup>215</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 22 July 2009.

<sup>216</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 22 July 2009.

<sup>217</sup> Correspondence with Helen Bevins, Leicester Shire Promotions Ltd., 30 October 2009.

<sup>218</sup> Davidson, 'Choice of a proper methodology', pp. 9-28, p. 24.

<sup>219</sup> Correspondence with Martin Traynor, Group Chief Executive of Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce 28 June 2010.

<sup>220</sup> Leicester Games 2009 Limited Financial Statements for Year Ended 31 March 2010, p.14

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Nick Townsend, Self Unlimited, 11 August 2010.

<sup>222</sup> LCC & Leicester Partnership (2007) *The Diversity of Leicester: A Demographic Profile*. 28th June 2007, Final Draft, 1st edition.

<sup>223</sup> In the 2001 Census the population of Leicester was 280,000.

<sup>224</sup> *ITV Central Tonight* did end its coverage of SOL 2009 with the message, 'Congratulations from ITV Central Tonight'.

<sup>225</sup> *Guardian*, 14 July 2010

<sup>226</sup> Interview with Trish Branson, Service Manager, Learning Disability Team, Leicester City Council, 12 October 2009.

<sup>227</sup> Interview with Yasmin Surti, Planning and Service Development Officer, Learning Disability Team, Leicester City Council, 12 October 2009.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Yasmin Surti.

<sup>229</sup> Interview with Trish Branson.

<sup>230</sup> Susan Barton was part of the Diversity Panel and she wrote in her report on 28 September 2010 of Lee Penfold's internship experience at Central TV that:

Newsroom staff at Central TV had the opportunity to learn about learning disabilities and hopefully, the presence of a supporter for Lee [Susan Barton] assisted this process, as information and clarification of issues to do with Aspergers could be given on the spot. Learning disability issues are now on the agenda of Central News.

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<sup>231</sup> Barton, *A Sporting Chance*, p. 29.

<sup>232</sup> Interview with Leicester City Council disability advisor 6 July 2009

<sup>233</sup> Keith Storey, 'The more things change, the more things stay the same: Continuing Concerns with the Special Olympics', *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, vol. 33 (3), 2008, p. 135.

<sup>234</sup> This issue is also raised for Paralympics athletes. A 90-minute Channel 4 documentary *Incredible Athletes* (2010), for example, was aimed at celebrating the achievements of disabled athletes. The programme was accused, however, of over-dramatising the constraints placed on athletes, and resorting too frequently to words such as 'extraordinary', 'commitment' and 'courage' in a manner which was 'tacitly patronising.' This hyperbolic language distracted from what should have been the main focus: the performances of those involved, viewed through the normative prism of sport. See Brian Moore, 'Admire sports ability, not disability.' *Daily Telegraph* 2 September 2010.

<sup>235</sup> Storey, 'The more things change, the more things stay the same', p. 140.

<sup>236</sup> Field Notes.

<sup>237</sup> Correspondence with Richard Watson.

<sup>238</sup> Jonathan Weiss, Terry Diamond, Jenny Demark and Benedicte Lovald, 'Involvement in Special Olympics and its relations to self-concept and actual competency in participants with developmental disabilities', *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 24, 2003, p. 298

<sup>239</sup> According to Su Barton, who acted as a supporter for Lee Penfold at Central TV, these positive outcomes were both personal and professional in nature. She wrote in her report on the internship on 28 September 2010 that:

'Lee's internship was a positive experience for all concerned. For Lee, personally, this was an important moment in his life. For the Central newsroom staff, hopefully, it was also a life changing and enhancing moment which will have a positive effect on their reporting and the representation of people with learning disabilities in the television media. Evidence of this was demonstrated in the excellent coverage of the Special Olympics European Games last week. The stories were in the sports section of Central News and no longer seen as 'human interest' stories. I have heard positive comments from members of the public on this who know of my interest in Special Olympics.'

<sup>240</sup> Carolyn Hughes and Meghan McDonald, 'The Special Olympics: sporting or social event?' *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, vol. 33 (3), 2008, pp. 143-5.

<sup>241</sup> See William McLean, 'Special Olympics: the rest of the Storey' *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, vol. 33 (3), 2008, pp. 146-9.

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<sup>242</sup> Hughes and McDonald, 'The Special Olympics: sporting or social event?', pp. 143-5.

<sup>243</sup> *Times Higher Education*, 27 May 2010, p. 48.

<sup>244</sup> Interview with Nick Townsend.

<sup>245</sup> Interview with Trish Branson.

<sup>246</sup> [www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)

<sup>247</sup> *Lancet*, 21 November 1953, pp. 1053-7.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Trish Branson.

<sup>249</sup> J. Weiss *et al* 'Involvement in Special Olympics', p. 298.

<sup>250</sup> Interview with Justin Hammond, Project Manager, Leicester Learning Disability Team, Leicester City Council, 12 October 2009.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with Justin Hammond.

<sup>252</sup> Cheddi Gore the Sports Development Manager for Leicester-Shire & Rutland (LRS) said of the 2009 Games: 'We aim to do the best we can for young people to inspire them to participate and develop their talent. If we create opportunities for them, who knows how far they will go?' Quoted in *Leicester Mercury* 1 July 2009.

<sup>253</sup> Correspondence with Kate Scott, Leicestershire's Schools Sport Development Officer 18 August 2010.

<sup>254</sup> Special Olympics Young Athletes Programme, publicity leaflet

<sup>255</sup> Rachel Duncan, PARTS Sports Coach, 9 September 2010, quoted in a film produced by Bipin Anand of Touch Rainbow Productions for distribution by Special Olympics Europe.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> Ann Standley, headteacher, West Gate School, 9 September 2010, quoted in a film produced by Bipin Anand of Touch Rainbow Productions for distribution by Special Olympics Europe.

<sup>258</sup> This situation was perhaps helped because Leicester was awarded the Games in 2007 under a Labour council but they were staged with a Liberal-Conservative coalition in power. It would have been difficult and hypocritical for Labour to offer any criticisms.

<sup>259</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 31 August 2010.

<sup>260</sup> Finance Sub-Committee Legacy Workshop, SOL 2009, 18 December 2009.

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<sup>261</sup> Interview with Leicester City Council disability advisor, 6 July 2009.

<sup>262</sup> Correspondence with Kate Scott, 18 August 2010.

<sup>263</sup> Correspondence with Gaye Barber, SOGB, 23 September 2010.

<sup>264</sup> Interview with Justin Hammond.

<sup>265</sup> There is some evidence, for example, that members of the Games staff in Leicester simply returned to their 'normal' jobs after the event, with no real emphasis on how their experience might be used more strategically in the local authority and elsewhere.

<sup>266</sup> Interview with Nick Townsend.

<sup>267</sup> Interview with Trish Branson.

<sup>268</sup> Interview with Justin Hammond.

<sup>269</sup> Interview with Nick Townsend.

<sup>270</sup> Correspondence with Andy Heffer, SOGB, 27 April 2010.

<sup>271</sup> Interview with Leicester Legacy team.